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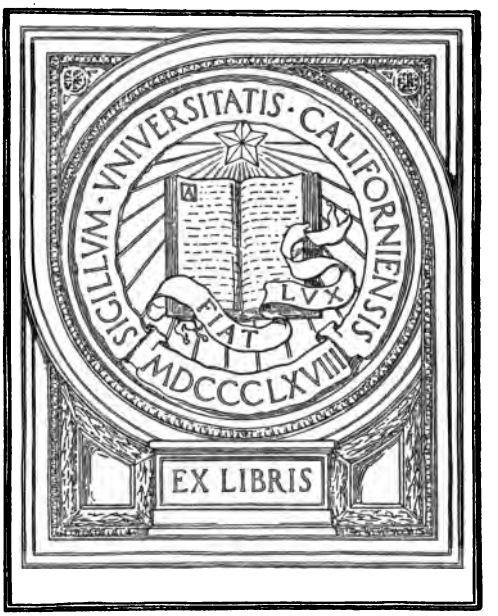
CATHERINE CHILD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CATHERINE'S CHILD

BY

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AUTHOR OF "PETER'S MOTHER";
"THE LONELY LADY OF GROSVENOR SQUARE";
"THE MAN FROM AMERICA," ETC.

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CATHERINE'S CHILD

Only if wakening to sad truth at last,
The bitterness to come, the sweetness past,
When thou art vexed, then turn again to see
Thou hast loved Hope—but Memory has loved thee.
HOOD.

CHAPTER I

PHILIPPA ADELSTANE was sixteen years old, and the heiress-presumptive of Welwysbere Abbey, in the county of Devon; of the great property appertaining thereto, and of a very considerable fortune besides.

She lived with her mother, Catherine, the widow of the late Sir Philip Adelstane, at Shepherd's Rest, a small farmhouse on the side of a steep wooded hill, which afforded views of a fair broad valley and of a wide expanse of agricultural country divided into chessboard squares of arable and pasture, and backed by a far-reaching chain of blue hills.

Below the cottage where Philippa dwelt could be discerned the turrets of the Abbey among the

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trees of the deer-park. The farms of her expected inheritance were scattered over the hillsides. In the valley itself, the low roofs of Welwysbere village bordered a single street, dominated at one end by the square brown tower of the village church, and at the other by Squire Chilcott's white house, which stood a little apart, surrounded by its own grounds and solid farm buildings.

Welwysbere, being entailed in the male line, was now the property of Sir Cecil Adelstane, who had succeeded his uncle, Sir Philip. But Sir Cecil had been married many years and was yet childless, so that the eventual succession of Philippa to her late father's estate appeared certain.

Sir Cecil had almost ceased to regret the non-arrival of his expected sons; he was fond of his young cousin, and proud of her good looks, which nearly resembled his own.

His family pride was further soothed by the reflection that it would not be the first time in the history of the Adelstanes that the Abbey had descended through a female, and that Philippa's son would be entitled to assume the name and arms of the family, as the son of her ancestress had done in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, nor were his descendants a penny the worse for the circumstance.

But if Philippa had inherited her fine features,

straight profile, and haughty expression from her father, she no less resembled her grandmother, Lady Sarah Adelstane, in the brightness of her colouring, her tall, well-formed figure, and the ruddy tint of her splendid chestnut hair.

Old Lady Sarah recognised the reproduction of her former self with unfeigned pleasure, and when she learned that Philippa, in addition to her beauty, had also inherited her early wilfulness and headstrong temper, she was more amused than concerned. Lady Sarah had long since acquired philosophy, a possession which doubles in value with every year of advancing age.

She was no longer beautiful, but she insisted, with great spirit, upon rendering herself as picturesque as possible. Her height had dwindled, for the burden of years weighed down her shoulders in spite of the most gallant efforts she could make; but her blue eyes were still bright, her white wig was becomingly dressed, and her delicate wrinkled face was even shrewder and merrier now than in the days of her youth.

On Philippa's face the merriment was lacking. Though not so entirely devoid of humour as her cousin, Sir Cecil, she was yet too young to appreciate her grandmother's light-heartedness. The levity of Lady Sarah pained no less than it puzzled her.

Lady Sarah had passed her eighty-second birthday; thus, since she could no longer ex-

tort her friends' admiration for her youth, she liked to astonish them with her age, and by adding an imaginary decade was enabled to allude to herself as a nonagenarian with perfect cheerfulness.

She did not see her grandchild often. She lived in London, and spent her winters abroad; but as the little house in Curzon Street was too small to accommodate visitors, and as Philippa's mother seldom or never left home, their meetings were confined to the rare occasions when the old lady took it into her head to visit her grandson at Welwysbere.

These visits were infrequent, for, though she was fond of Sir Cecil, she detested his wife, Augusta; and was convinced besides that the damp of the West Country was detrimental to her constitution.

About the time of her granddaughter's sixteenth birthday, however, she invited herself to the Abbey for Whitsuntide, and Philippa made haste to acquaint her mother with the news that Lady Sarah was coming.

She entered the oak parlour of Shepherd's Rest breathless with the haste she had made in climbing the narrow high-banked, winding lane from the village to her home.

"Granny is coming to the Abbey, mother," cried Philippa, "and Cousin Augusta says that when they all go back to town after Whitsuntide

she wants to take me with her. Oh, mother, I like Cousin Augusta better and better every moment, she is so deliciously kind to me. I had no idea she was such an angel. To be sure I was only a child when I saw her last—not fourteen—and she owns quite frankly that she never cared for children. But now I am grown up we are to be real friends. I think it's sweet of her to be friends with me, don't you?"

"My darling, how you have overheated yourself," said Catherine.

Philippa flung her hat on to the sofa, and her gloves after it, and her mother picked them up as they fell on the floor.

"Bother!" said Philippa, "and I thought you would be so excited to hear the news about Granny, mother. I almost ran all the way."

"So I am, very much excited," said her mother placidly. "But for all that I wish you would not run uphill in this warm weather. I am very glad Granny is coming, and we will go together to call upon her directly she arrives."

"Yes, yes. But about my going to town, mamma? Don't begin by saying at once that I am not to go, as you always do——"

"You know I never accept such invitations for you, Phil."

"Yes, but listen," said her daughter, imploringly. "It is quite different from Cousin Augusta's usual written invitations, which you

used to say were *hollow* (though I am certain *now* they couldn't have been). She really *means* it, and Cousin Cecil wants me to go too; and, what is more, they are not only going to ask you themselves, but they are going to get Granny to speak to you about it."

"Indeed," said Catherine.

She was not readily displeased, but the colour rose in her soft face.

Philippa stood looking down upon her mother, tapping an impatient foot upon the polished oaken floor of the little parlour.

Against the background of innumerable books which lined the room from floor to ceiling her handsome, fresh-coloured face and bright hair stood out with striking effect.

Catherine looked up from the writing-table, where she had been making up her farm accounts, at the dearly loved face, now deeply flushed with purest carmine; at the curved mouth, with its short upper lip and corners sulkily drooping; at the straight brows drawn into a frown above the black-lashed deep-blue eyes.

"After all, I'm sixteen," said Philippa, rebelliously.

"At sixteen," said Catherine, and she tried to laugh, "London is, happily, not obligatory. You will not come out for another two years, you know."

"But that's no reason why I should never

go anywhere nor have any pleasure, no matter who asks me," cried Philippa, with a sudden smothered sob. "Cousin Augusta says I ought to go to town before I come out, and make friends with people of my own age, and Cousin Cecil thinks so too. You know he *never* says anything without thinking it over. And, after all, he's my nearest relation, and my guardian in a way."

"No," said Catherine, "it is I that am your guardian, though I very gladly take counsel with your Cousin Cecil. Sit down, my darling, and let us talk it over quietly together. If you want to go to town so much, though it is a bad time of the year for me to get away—what with the hay and one thing and another—still, you come first, and I will see what can be done. But I have no idea of handing you over to Augusta. I will take you myself, darling. Only, I thought last time we went to London, Phil, that the trip was not a success. You said you never wished to go again."

"Of course it wasn't a success," said Philippa. "Why, you know I hated it. You hated it yourself, mother. It would be just like it was before if *you* took me. A horrid hotel, and at the last moment Aunt Dulcinea would insist on coming with us; and there we should be, like regular country cousins, all of us bewildered and not knowing where to go or what to do, and every-

thing hateful. I would rather stop at home if we are to go like that."

"It would not be like that again," said Catherine, but her mind misgave her faintly. "You are older now, and we could go to concerts and theatres and picture-galleries, and—and—I daresay Aunt Dulcinea wouldn't want to come."

"You know she *would*," said Philippa. "And you'd say it was unkind not to take her. Of course we can't hurt her feelings—and theatres and concerts are all very well in their way——"

"I should think so," said Catherine. "Why, when I was your age——"

"Oh, mother, *don't*," said Philippa, despairingly. "I know so exactly what you're going to say. How a travelling circus or a fair seemed the wildest excitement to you when you lived with your cross old aunt in Calais; and how you were quite contented to go down to the pier every day with Sophy, and see the steamer come in; and how grateful you were to my father when he bought you a sixpenny fairing. You have told me a thousand times."

"It is quite true. I have told you very often," Catherine acknowledged; but he felt a little pang, nevertheless, as she heard the sacred recollections of her girlhood thus ruthlessly epitomised. "It did not take very much to content me in those days."

"Well, I am not a bit like you, and it wouldn't have contented *me*," said Philippa.

"I don't know what would content you, Phil, you are so restless."

"It would content me to go to London with Cousin Augusta."

"And leave me—?" There was a sound of pain in Catherine's low voice.

"Of course, if you put it like that," cried Philippa, angrily, "it takes away all the pleasure. But either way it will be horrid, I suppose; everything always is. If you don't come, you will think me cruel and heartless to go without you, though I don't feel a bit like that," and she shed tears, even whilst resisting with impatience her mother's attempted caress. "And if you come, why, I know you will hate it, and have nothing to do, and only be longing to get back to the farm and the dairy, and feeling sure everything is going to rack and ruin without you, as of course it will."

"I always meant to take a house in London when you were eighteen," said Catherine, meekly.

"What would be the good of that? You don't know anybody in London," sobbed Philippa.

"But Lady Sarah does. She would take care you had all the proper invitations. And I could go everywhere with you, as your mother should."

"Not nowadays," said Philippa. "It's a most old-fashioned idea, mother. And it's all very well; but, as Cousin Augusta says, Granny can't go on for ever; her friends are as old as the hills; even if she would be bothered to think about

me, which I am sure she wouldn't. And when Cousin Augusta is so kind, and when you know how much I love her——"

"Your love is only two days old," said Catherine, smiling.

"It's just as real as though I had known her for years. More real, for I haven't had time to get tired of her," said Philippa, innocently. "Oh, mother, I do think it's very hard I'm to be cooped up in this horrid, dull old farmhouse for two whole years more. You know yourself every one wonders why we live here at all."

Catherine was silent; her gentle eyes regarded her daughter wistfully. But whilst Philippa was in this mood she could not remind her why she held the little house sacred. She said to herself, besides, that the child had some reason on her side. Catherine was aware that the family in general criticised her home, and found it a most unsuitable residence for the young heiress of Welwysbere.

"It won't be so dull for you this Whitsuntide, my darling, since Augusta has come home, and especially since you have taken this sudden liking for her."

"But she will be gone back to town in a few days. And she said herself that they would be a very dull party—all elderly people—only Granny, and the Ralts, and old Lord John——"

"Your Cousin Cecil said they would certainly

spend this summer down here, after their long absence from Devonshire."

"But Cousin Augusta hasn't said so," said Philippa, shrewdly.

"Anyway, David Moore will be at Bridescombe," said poor Catherine, searching for further consolation. "You were so anxious to see him when we read about him in the newspapers during the war."

"Of course I want to see him," said Philippa, dolefully. "Any one would like to see a hero like that. But I should see him in London just as well if he's going to be at the War Office. Besides, after all, he's Hector and Lily Chilcott's uncle, not mine."

Catherine glanced at her beautiful daughter, and smiled tenderly to herself. What a child—what a baby she was yet, though she looked so tall and womanly!

"I am looking forward to seeing David again very much. The brother of my dearest friend. As a youth he used to be something like poor Delia, quick and bright and decided as she was. My heart aches for him, coming home to find only her grave—and the children."

"But, mother—she died such years ago——"

"It does not seem so very long ago to me."

"It's all very well for you and Cousin George. I suppose he will be glad to see his poor wife's brother. But I do not see how his coming can

make any difference to me. He will only be just another old person, like Cousin George or Cousin Cecil."

"He is younger than George or Cecil; they are over forty, like Augusta."

"*She* doesn't look nearly so old as they do," said Augusta's faithful worshipper.

"David cannot be more than six-and-thirty—still a young man."

"Mother, how can you! Why, he's older than *you*. And if he will be a companion for you and Cousin George, it ought surely to make it all the easier for you to let me go to London with Cousin Augusta, and have a little pleasure in life whilst I'm still young enough to enjoy it, instead of bottling me up here for ever and ever with no one to speak to and nothing to do."

"I wish Augusta had not come down here at all to unsettle you like this."

"Mother, I won't have you blaming her," said Philippa, with flashing eyes. "You know very well I've been unsettled for ever so long, and wishing I could go anywhere or do anything fresh and different."

Catherine could not deny the truth of this statement.

"I wish you would not cry, my darling. It will distress your Aunt Dulcinea so terribly when she comes in."

"Bother Aunt Dulcinea! You think of every

one's feelings but mine," said Philippa, woefully.

Catherine could not help smiling.

"Don't be a goose, Phil. Come upstairs, and let me bathe your eyes and straighten this ruffled mass of hair, and we will try to come to a better understanding over this matter."

Philippa suffered her mother to take her arm and lead her upstairs. She had no maid of her own—another family grievance—and she was accustomed to be tended almost like an infant by those unwearying hands. But though submissive she was pertinacious, and did not allow any postponement or evasion of her demand.

"I'm sure I'm very reasonable, mother. I only want you not to decide against my going until you have heard what Cousin Cecil has to say," she said; and it was hard for Catherine to resist her child's entreaty when those fresh lips were pressed against her cheek and when the beloved voice took a coaxing accent.

"There are your lessons, you know, my darling."

"Am I never to have a holiday?" cried Philippa, tragically.

"Your life is one long holiday, I think."

"It may seem so to you, but it doesn't to me, what with French reading and horrid old Molière, and dull old biographies and things," said Philippa resentfully.

"Do you want to learn nothing more—at sixteen?"

"I know quite as much as most people. Cousin Augusta can't even spell, and yet I am sure she is fashionable and delightful, and nobody cares. Oh, mother, forget to preach for once, and say you will let me just pay this one visit."

"I will see about it," said Catherine, in the relenting tone that was generally the prelude to giving way, as Philippa well knew.

"You promise?"

"I promise anyway," said her mother, "to consult your grandmother before I decide finally one way or the other."

. . . . .

Catherine had been a widow for so many years that her grief for her husband had become only the shadow and remembrance of sorrow.

She had been very young, hardly nineteen, when Sir Philip died and his posthumous child was born. From that time onwards she had made her home in this cottage on the hillside, to which she had taken a romantic fancy shortly before his death, and which he had bought and given to her for her own.

Her girlhood had been passed in almost entire seclusion, and her brief experience of marriage, though it had widened her outlook and completed the sole romance of her life, had not yet inspired her with any great courage or desire to face again the world from which she had timidly sought refuge at Shepherd's Rest.

From her latticed windows she beheld the turrets of the great house where for so short a space of time she had nominally reigned as mistress —an inexperienced girl, bewildered with her own happiness and frightened at her unexpected elevation.

But if the mighty pile of ancient buildings recalled her past importance, the square tower of the old church in the valley below no less solemnly and silently reminded her of the vanity of all earthly greatness, for in its shadow stood the broken column which marked Sir Philip Adelstane's grave.

Catherine had never found her life at Shepherd's Rest dull. Independence has its own charm, and she enjoyed the sensation of real ownership for the first time when she looked around her tiny domain.

She planned anew her garden, which shone in the heart of the woods like a coloured jewel in a dark setting. She lined her low oak parlour with shelves from floor to ceiling, and filled those shelves with books; for of reading Catherine had never had, and perhaps never would have, enough. Thus, though her outer existence appeared prosaic, her inner life was filled with colour and fancy.

She interested herself besides so deeply in her farm and dairy, that she presently grew practical, and, after buying her experience somewhat

dearly, found that in Devonshire, at least, it is possible to make farming pay.

She reclaimed rough land, planted orchards, studied forestry, learnt something about cattle, and brewed excellent cider; keeping all within and without her snug home in such a state of order, neatness, and beauty that no one could behold it and not be cheered by its aspect.

An energetic and faithful Somersetshire woman, one Charlotte Roper, aided her mistress within doors, and without an aged local wiseacre toiled, aided by a burly labourer and by Charlotte Roper's son Johnny, who took charge of Philippa's pony, ran errands, and worked in the garden under his lady's personal supervision.

It pleased Catherine to know that her income was rolling itself up into a fortune for Philippa which would make her independent, even if the long-expected and now improbable son were born to Sir Cecil Adelstane; it pleased her yet more to be able to give liberal assistance to her poorer neighbours in time of need, and to be justified in affording a domicile to her old aunt, Miss Dulcinea Chilcott, whose last days she thus rendered happy and peaceful, and whose presence had lent protection to her niece's youth and loneliness.

Miss Dulcinea, in spite of her advancing age, was rarely to be found at home. She had lifelong friends in the neighbourhood and in the adjacent

town of Ilverton; she knew every man, woman, and child in the village of Welwysbere, visited every cottage within reach, and read the Bible to the inmates whether they liked it or not. Most of them liked it, and all of them liked her, for they had known her from childhood, and her friendship was tried and trusted. The villagers believed in her wisdom implicitly, and few of them cared to take the doctor's medicine until it had been handed to Miss Dulcinea for approval.

A dark disbelief in their physician, together with constant recourse to his aid in the most trifling ailments, was prevalent in Welwysbere.

As men who were in good health could not, or would not, leave their work, it was generally the patient himself who rose from the bed of suffering and walked to Ilverton and back—seven miles—to visit the doctor and obtain remedies from the dispensary.

If the illness were complicated, and the invalid in pain or unusually feverish, he would perhaps treat himself to a return ticket for Exeter; since the further away the physician lived the more efficacious his aid was considered likely to be.

The excitement of the journey usually cheered the sufferer, as the subsequent history of the interview with his medical adviser cheered his family and neighbours, for whose benefit it would be many times recounted in detail.

Miss Dulcinea was too simple to quarrel with

these methods, and there was some truth in her excuses to Catherine.

"You laugh at them, darling, but, after all, they do just what their betters do, only in a humbler way. They can't afford to go further than the next village or town, but we send our invalids travelling about to look for health in far countries, to visit chilly hotels with doubtful drains and strange doctors, when they would get well or die far more comfortably in their own homes, with their own doctors to attend them and their own people round them. I don't see that the Welwysbere folk are so very unlike us in their methods."

But Catherine's laughter was very gentle, and expressed no contempt for Miss Dulcinea's simplicity. She felt that she had, herself, no vocation to set the village to rights, and contented herself with her garden, her household, her farm, and the upbringing of Philippa.

For above and beyond all other cares and interests, or the occupations she so happily found for herself, stood Catherine's idol, her only child.

She guarded Philippa's infancy and childhood with jealous care, permitting no hands but her own to tend the little maid; nursing her, teaching her, and playing with her, and sleeping nightly by the side of the cot which contained her treasure.

Philippa, as was natural, rewarded this exclusive

devotion by a tyranny that was absolute in her babyhood, and only modified outwardly as she became older. She grew up exceedingly unlike the daughter of Catherine's dreams.

Her mother dwelt sometimes with astonishment upon her recollections of herself at sixteen. She recalled a quiet, rather timid maiden, grateful for the smallest notice, interested in the smallest happenings, curled up for hours of breathless absorption in every volume that came her way; learning poems by heart for love; sewing endless seams with patient neatness; assisting in the *ménage;* and writing business letters in a copper-plate hand at her aunt's dictation.

Perhaps she recalled less clearly the fact that she would hardly have become so proficient in such duties had she not been actually compelled by the exigency of circumstances.

The youthful Catherine might have preferred, like the youthful Philippa, to throw her needle-work on to the floor, and escape out of doors at her own sweet will, had she been free to follow her inclinations; but old Miss Carey, of Calais, Catherine's aunt, having been a strict disciplinarian, her niece had dared try no such experiment.

Philippa never sat curled up on the window-seat as Catherine had pictured her, nestling to her mother's side and devouring the story-books which had been chosen for her and ranged on a

special shelf within her reach before she was four years old.

She never opened a book if she could help it, did not like to be read to, and wept as copiously over her lessons as though a stern taskmaster were set over her, instead of the gentlest teacher in the world.

Far from rejoicing when an elegant inlaid workbox was presented to her, she viewed it with indifference, lost the thimble, used the embroidery stiletto as a gimlet, and broke the points of the scissors digging in the garden.

She took more interest in the farm, lavishing personal affection upon the stock, and including indiscriminately in her friendship the pony, the pigs, the cows, and the aged labourer who superintended their welfare. But she could not be trusted to be of the smallest use in any department of the homely establishment.

She would offer to help in the dairy, upset the cream, or leave off churning just as the butter was coming, and rush away to do something else; she would solemnly undertake to feed the chickens, and forget all about them; she would tear her frocks, and walk about ragged and unconcerned; she ate green apples and climbed trees in spite of all entreaties to the contrary, and was triumphant because none of the evil consequences predicted happened to result.

Whenever she could she escaped to Bridescombe,

to the society of her cousins, the children of the widowed squire, George Chilcott; but, truth to tell, they were not much more inclined to welcome her than her mother was to let her go. Nor did she derive much benefit from their society; since Hector, though bigger and stronger than she was, could not fight a girl, however unreasonable and provoking she might be; while little Lily, though willing to admire, was led into innumerable scrapes through her senior's readiness to defy lawful authority.

Miss Dulcinea found a thousand excuses for all Philippa's misdemeanours, and, though Catherine were ever so determined that her daughter should not be spoilt, the presence of a constant champion in the background rendered discipline of any kind almost impossible. Philippa was perfectly aware of her grand-aunt's sympathy, and the knowledge nullified all her mother's attempts to maintain her own supremacy. Naturally imperious, she grew daily more inclined to assert herself. She had shown a generous and affectionate disposition as a little child, but these qualities became obscured as she advanced towards womanhood; and, though she displayed an occasional careless fondness for the gentle, foolish old relative who was blind to her failings and flattered her vanity, she did not, it must be confessed, sacrifice a single inclination of her own to any care for Miss Dulcinea's wishes and comfort, but, on the

contrary, escaped from her society whenever it was possible to do so.

Imperceptibly her mother's influence waned with every succeeding year, and Catherine found herself gradually assuming the false position of a seeming tyrant to the being she loved above all others in the world. But such situations develop by very slow degrees, and she was herself unaware of the cause until it was too late to amend the effects. Though they lived under the same roof and slept side by side, and were together almost every hour of the day, Catherine could not help feeling sometimes that her daughter was in many ways becoming as a stranger to her. Often she thought, with that loving bitterness which only mothers know, "I shall only have her a few years longer; she might have waited—she might have waited—until she was quite grown up."

Meanwhile, as Philippa lost her tomboy proclivities and acquired no love for rational occupation to take their place, the young lady found time hang heavily upon her hands and grew daily more restless. Perhaps the knowledge of her own importance as the last representative of the Adelstane family had something to do with her discontent. Her mother had endeavoured with all her might to keep Philippa unspotted from the world, isolating her in their country cottage, and bringing her up simply and humbly; but it is a fact that worldliness is not confined to

cities, and in this obscure corner of the West there were plenty of flatterers ready to pay court to the little heiress of Welwysbere, and to comment upon the position that should have been hers as her father's daughter.

Philippa desired she knew not what; but certainly a change from the quiet sameness of her everyday life on the farm. Perhaps to shine, to be admired, to have her importance recognised in a wider sphere. The natural restlessness of girlhood was doubled by the circumstances in which she found herself. She was not clever, but neither was she in any sense a dull child; and she did not show herself to others the baby her mother thought her, but, on the contrary, evinced a certain shrewdness and dignity; so that her Cousin Cecil believed her to be eminently suited by nature for the position awaiting her. Philippa's displays of idleness, imperiousness, and want of consideration for others were, it must be confessed, reserved chiefly for her home, and the girl was still young enough to mistake wilfulness and lack of self-control for strength of character. Thus, after the almost unclouded happiness of Philippa's early childhood, Catherine's existence had become a little troubled during these later days, and she vaguely perceived that the time was approaching when a change must be made in the existing order of things. When Philippa, therefore, broke in upon her mother's tranquil daily occupations

with her impetuous demand, the expression of her child's wishes coincided, in a manner, with Catherine's own vague determination.

"I shall like a change as little in two years' time as now," she thought with a sigh. "Perhaps I am growing selfish and too much absorbed in one narrow groove. I know they all think so, and what everybody thinks is apt to be true. After all, when I chose this 'little life,' I did not know that Cecil would have no children—that Philippa might be called upon one day to occupy his place. Perhaps I am really less suited to take her to town than Augusta. And the child does not really want me." This reflection caused Catherine a sharp pang, though she tried to smile over it, and repeated to herself more than once that under the circumstances this was only natural.

"It is quite true what Philippa says, I know nobody in London, and should be a fish out of water. As soon as Lady Sarah comes I will ask her advice. She is very wise, and knows what Philip would have wished for his child. I will be guided by her."

Catherine was, perhaps, slightly consoled by the reflection that Lady Sarah's decision would not be influenced by any undue prejudice in favour of Augusta.

CHAPTER II

THE open space before the entrance of Welwysbere Abbey was surrounded by clumps of tree azaleas, dipping clouds of faintest coral and palest gold blossom into the feathery flowering grasses which rose knee-deep around them, half hiding the thickets of rhododendrons, now crowned with purple and crimson bloom. Beyond lay the rolling slopes of the deer-park and the steep green hillocks and valleys, relieved by all the colours of spring—from the gay rose-red and snowy white of the sturdy gnarled hawthorns to the giant blush and ivory nosegays of the spreading horse-chestnuts.

But though a group of persons stood upon the lower steps of the front door, shading their eyes from the dazzling rays of the western sun, their gaze was not directed towards the landscape, but bent upon a dingy object which occupied the centre of the drive—a mud-spattered automobile, dropping oil upon the gravel, and emitting an odour which overpowered the delicate perfumes of the spring.

The owner of the machine, a red-faced sporting-

looking gentleman, was stooping over his property with an air of almost passionate concern.

"I thought she would have broken her little back coming up that last hill," he said, looking up reproachfully at his host.

"It is very steep, but the horses make nothing of it," said Sir Cecil, rather resentfully; "I never had a horse who didn't face it all right."

"So did she *face* it," said Mr. Ralt, defending his treasure with emotion. "She faced it bravely, too, or we shouldn't be here now."

"I could not have believed she would bear the strain," said his wife, shaking her head.

"D'ye think she's all right, Hopkins?" demanded Mr. Ralt, with renewed anxiety.

"Seems so, sir," said the chauffeur reluctantly, "but it was taking it out of her something crool. She ain't built for this 'ere country. It's asking too much of her, that's what it is."

"I ought to have brought the Daimler," said Mr. Ralt, sadly. "You said so, Blanche, at the time. However"—he cheered up slightly—"I can send for her to-morrow, and so I will."

"Shall we go and find Augusta and have some tea, Blanche?" said Sir Cecil, stiffly. He ignored his brother-in-law and addressed himself to Mrs. Ralt, who prepared to follow him, after a last anxious and sympathetic glance at the motor.

"I daresay you think we're rather foolish about her," she said, with a sentimental intonation that

contrasted oddly with her lean, sensible face and shrewd eyes; "but she's such a little dear, carried us thousands of miles."

"I suppose you've given up horses altogether," said Sir Cecil, in his even, formal tones, as he led the way under the cool dark arches of the oak-panelled hall to the garden door.

"Well, except for huntin,' and we did precious little huntin' this winter. The fact is it's simply fascinatin' to go explorin' Europe, which is what we did instead of stoppin' up at Ralt through the winter as usual. You don't mean to say you and Augusta are still contented to go joggin' along in the family coach, and all the good old ways?"

"I believe I am old-fashioned, and I am happy to say Augusta continues to prefer the good old ways."

"You don't say so! Hullo! tea on the lawn! Come, that's an innovation. Augusta used to hate tea out of doors."

"She is doing the fresh-air cure."

"I'm sure I'm glad to hear it. It was time she did a cure of some kind," said Mrs. Ralt cheerfully. "I live in a thorough draught myself now, and look at me."

Sir Cecil looked, but his sister-in-law was too much engrossed in her observation of the assembly of persons which now became visible at the far end of the lawn to notice the dissatisfied expression upon his handsome face.

"I thought Augusta said there wasn't to be a party. Who in the world are all those people under the cedar if there isn't a party?" she cried.

"There is no party. My grandmother is staying here, and in consequence of her advanced age we thought it better to be quiet. There is only Lady Grace Trumoin, and Lord John Trelleck, whom you know." Mrs. Ralt emitted an expressive grunt. "The others are our neighbours, George Chilcott and his sister—you remember them?—and his poor wife's brother, Colonel Moore, who has just returned to England."

"David Moore? I know him, too. Met him in South Africa. Splendid chap," said Mrs. Ralt heartily.

"You know every one, Blanche."

"I go about the world, keep my eyes open, and pick up friends all over the place," said Mrs. Ralt, who had equipped a field hospital at her own expense during the South African war, and quarrelled with the authorities over every detail of its organisation. "Bless me, you don't mean to say that tall girl is little Philippa!"

"She is only sixteen," said Sir Cecil, with something of fatherly pride in his tone. "But she is a very fine girl indeed—strangers would take her for nineteen or twenty."

Here Lady Adelstane perceived the advent of her husband and sister, and came across the

lawn to meet them as quickly as dignity and *embonpoint* combined would permit.

The twin sisters presented a remarkable contrast: Blanche, tall and somewhat scraggy in figure, with a tanned and weather-beaten appearance, which the rigidity of her motor-coat and peaked cap did nothing to soften or disguise; while Augusta preserved a certain youthfulness of contour in spite of her forty years. Her dress was eminently becoming; her soft throat and dimpled chin rose from cobweb folds of lace and muslin, and her face, cherubic in its roundness, was shaded by the latest Paris creation in garden hats.

As the sisters embraced, their respective husbands could not but observe their striking dissimilarity.

"Poor Blanche!" reflected Sir Cecil; "she is certainly plainer and more ungainly than ever, and her voice becomes louder every year."

He was thankful that Providence had directed his choice to the younger of the twin heiresses of the late Lord Mocha.

"Poor Augusta!" thought Mr. Ralt, who had hurried after his wife, having lingered but to express his feelings regarding the configuration of the country, more freely than politeness permitted in the presence of his host and brother-in-law. "I declare she has put on another couple of stone at least since we last came down. And

here is Blanche more active than ever, able to nip out and push the little car uphill with the best of us."

"Darling," said Augusta, whose affection always increased, though but temporarily, when she had not seen her sister for a long time, "how glad I am you've come! It is actually three years since you were here."

"How time flies, Gussie; so it is. But you haven't been down here for ages yourself, have you? Which accounts for your not inviting *me*, I suppose," said Blanche in high good humour.

"The doctors wouldn't hear of my coming last year. They said I *must* be braced or they wouldn't answer for the consequences," said Augusta plaintively. "I don't know how it is, but I always get so run down at Welwysbere."

Sir Cecil coughed uneasily.

"We are practically alone," said Augusta, hurriedly changing the conversation and leading the way to the tea-table. "I hope you won't be bored to death."

"If I am," said the outspoken Blanche, "I can easily nip off with Bob to Ilfracombe or Land's End for a jaunt and a breath of sea air, and put ourselves into a good humour. You've no idea what a resource we've found motoring. But I'm not particularly likely to be bored with David Moore about. He's a great pal of mine. I held

his leg at Bloemfontein whilst the surgeon sewed it up."

"Really, Blanche——"

But Mrs. Ralt's manly stride had already carried her in advance of her sister and hostess to the cedar tree, and by the time Augusta arrived, breathless, in her wake, Blanche had shaken hands with the whole party there assembled and uttered her hearty greetings in her most penetrating tones.

"Well, Colonel Moore, this is luck indeed! I had no idea I was to meet you here. So you're to be at the War Office. Hope we shall see something of you, though town's not much in my line; but you can run up and stay with us, eh? How are you, Grace? You look flourishing. Philippa, you were a kid in short frocks when I saw you last. De do, Lord John, de do, Miss Chilcott." This last salutation was a very cool one; but George Chilcott she greeted warmly:

"How are the Shire horses? Must come over to your place again, if you will let me. I got no end of wrinkles for Ralt last time I was there. You never came North as you promised."

"I never go anywhere," said George Chilcott, smiling.

"Oh, George!" said his sister in deprecating tones.

Miss Clara Chilcott was seven-and-forty, but so

strong is the force of habit that her family still regarded her as a girl.

She wore a shirt and skirt, big boots, and a mushroom hat trimmed with daisies and buttercups. Though she resembled her brother George not a little, being large and heavy in build, and of a healthy, ruddy complexion, yet her meaningless light orbs lacked the kindness that shone from his steady blue eyes; and nothing could have been more unlike the expression of his firmly closed lips beneath his yellow moustache than Miss Clara's open mouth, and lower jaw perpetually dropped in surprise or disapproval.

"I call this such a stupid time of the year in the country," said Augusta to Mr. Ralt, with whom she found it difficult to converse, though she always made a point of addressing at least one remark to him at the beginning of his visit and another at the end. "No fruit or vegetables; the peas and strawberries actually only in flower, though we have been eating them for months in town; but London and Paris are the only places where one can get fruit and vegetables all the year round."

"With your range of glass your gardeners ought to supply you with plenty of forced strawberries—ours do," said Miss Chilcott, shocked. "But I suppose through your being so much away they get slack."

"I never think forced strawberries have any flavour," said Augusta blandly.

Miss Clara was proceeding to enumerate the names of the best kinds of strawberries for forcing when Mr. Ralt interrupted.

"You're like me, only different," he said, with lucid elegance. "You like London all the year round, and I like the country all the year round. Chopping and changing is what I hate. But I suppose you'll go back for the rest of the season?"

"Cecil insisted on coming here for Whitsuntide," said Augusta, "though I never think it worth while to come so far for so short a time. You could have come to us on the river, you know. My house there is really getting nicer every year. I'm making a wall and water garden which is a perfect dream. I am sure you and Blanche would have liked it better than this in many ways."

"Augusta, how *can* you," said Lady Grace's calm tones, "without wishing to insult your charming bungalow—" She glanced expressively towards the mellow creeper-clad walls of the stately Abbey, with its rows of mullioned windows blazing in the afternoon sunshine; at the broad terraces whereon great stone urns on pedestals held aloft scarlet and rose geraniums, and weather-stained statues guarded flights of moss-grown stone steps. The lawns were acres of velvet turf, centuries old, and shaded with mighty cedars, spreading oaks, and groups of tall elms sacred to ancient rookeries; there were silent pools bearing

rare lilies on their dark breasts, deeply shadowed by the tall yew hedges that walled them in; there were stiff out-of-date ribbon and heart-shaped borders, bright with variegated foliage in patterns, planted out for a brief summer season after the fashion beloved of former generations, and which Sir Cecil had no idea of changing to accord with a modern taste he knew little and cared nothing about.

To him old customs were sacred; and Augusta, who had her own way in so many things, dared not interfere with the head gardener at the Abbey, who had lived at Welwysbere and had charge of the pleasure-grounds before Sir Cecil was born.

Old Lady Sarah's pet parterre had been handed over to Augusta's tender mercies, because it was the custom from time immemorial for the lady of the house to exercise her whims upon this enclosure; and here Lady Adelstane was able to indulge the modern craze for catalogue gardening as cheerfully as she chose. Here she spent an occasional half-hour happily enough with a bulb list and a pencil, giving orders for the cutting down and rooting up of old-established and well-grown favourites, to make room for wonderful new combinations of colour and effect; though it was very improbable, since she never visited Welwysbere in the early spring, that she would behold the result of her plannings.

"I have heard your bungalow is too charming,"

said Lord John, "and such a convenient distance for week-ends."

"Grace always jeers at my Cockney villa," said Augusta good-humouredly. "I shall ask her no more; you shall come in her stead."

"I shall be delighted."

"Ask me here instead, Gussie," said Lady Grace, shrugging her shoulders very slightly, and reflecting how the good things of this life were wasted upon people who lacked taste to enjoy them.

She lay back in her easy chair and closed her eyes for a moment, as though the low rays of the sun were dazzling her. Perhaps she knew that a background of scarlet cushions was becoming to her white delicate-featured face and the long, graceful outlines of her rather thin but still pretty figure.

When she opened her eyes it was to perceive that George Chilcott was regarding her with an interest and kindness to which she was not insensible. He had been a favourite partner long ago when he was a young Guardsman and she a *débutante*. She had then thought him somewhat of a simpleton, and she observed that his simplicity had not diminished now that he had broadened into a typical forty-year-old country squire; but the honesty and friendliness of his regard were the same. She exerted herself to enter into conversation with George, and their talk

was full of the inquiries after old friends and the reminders of pleasant days gone by incidental to past intimacy.

"She wears well, though she must be forty, by gad!" thought Lord John, adding half a dozen years to the poor lady's age with the unfeeling calm of a man who has grown tired of meeting an acquaintance too often in unchanging circumstances. "I wonder why she never married. She was an uncommonly handsome girl once."

He too had enjoyed dancing and flirting with Lady Grace when she first came out, some sixteen seasons ago, and had even regretted for a time that her lack of a fortune rendered it impossible for him to fall in love with her seriously and marry her.

But Lord John, who had grown bald and stout and grey in the interval, and was, indeed, nearly twenty years her senior, now looked upon this slender, graceful woman as completely *passée*, and thought of her, when he thought of her at all, with good-natured pity, as one of London's failures.

"Oh, must you go, Mr. Chilcott?" said Augusta.

"Surely you won't take Colonel Moore away the moment I arrive?" shouted Mrs. Ralt.

"We've been here for hours already," said George Chilcott good-humouredly, "and though David's an idle man for the moment, I'm not, you know. Come, Clara."

Miss Chilcott showed signs of a willingness to linger, but her hostess shook her hand with so much alacrity that she was obliged to follow the Squire's decided lead.

"You must come over and see Lily soon, Philippa. You've not been to Bridescombe for ages, and she will want to see you in your first long frocks," said Miss Chilcott with patronising affability to Philippa, whose fair brow grew scarlet with the agonised resentment peculiar to self-conscious youth under the notice thus drawn to her extremely recent promotion from childhood.

Lord John Trelleck examined the girl closely from under the brim of his straw hat, and observed that she looked extraordinarily handsome as she stood before her ponderous middle-aged relative, her straight brows drawn together in a frown over her blue long-lashed eyes, and her brilliant colouring enhanced by the angry flush.

"Got a temper, too," he said to himself, with lazy amusement; and he tried presently to talk to the little heiress of Welwysbere, and to draw her out of her half-shy, half-sullen attitude of watchful silence and embarrassment.

But he did not succeed very well, for at this period of Philippa's existence men who happened to be possessed of bald heads, or wrinkles, or grey beards, did not count; they were merely part of the furniture of life, so to speak, and it could not matter particularly to any one, and certainly

not to her, what they said, thought, or did; so that she answered Lord John quite at random and took no interest at all in his skilfully chosen remarks.

It was nothing to Philippa that he was a member of the Yacht Squadron, a friend of Royalty, and altogether one of the most fashionable men in London. Her attention was fixed upon Augusta and she grudged that it should be distracted even for a moment from the object of her childish admiration. She had not seen Augusta for three years—a long period in a young life: but a happy compliment at meeting had aroused her enthusiastic gratitude: it was delightful, at sixteen, to be hailed as grown up, and assured to her face that she was attractive and beautiful to behold.

Philippa had arrived at a time of life when most maidens, whether romantically or otherwise inclined, form attachments, sometimes for the strangest and most unlikely objects. She conceived a sudden devotion for her cousin; admired her extravagant gowns, raved about her dimples, and even imitated, for a time, and to her mother's horror, the peculiar thick gabble in which Augusta spoke.

Catherine, reflecting upon the list of Philippa's past idols (which included the lad who blew the bellows for the church organ, the village schoolmistress, and the miller's baby), decided that this new enthusiasm pleased her the least of all. She

tried, however, to hide the natural mortification which must be felt by a parent who sees her child admiring, and prepared to imitate, a model felt to be unworthy, and consoled herself as best she might with the remembrance of her daughter's fickleness.

Nothing, however, had as yet occurred to disillusion Philippa; and thus she was so happily engaged in looking at and listening to Augusta that she could not spare any attention at all for Lord John, though she permitted herself an occasional glance towards the tall bronzed soldier who was talking to Mrs. Ralt.

So this was Colonel Moore, the hero of Hector and Lily's dreams; the brother of their poor, beautiful young mother, who had died ten years ago, when Lily was born.

Philippa could not, after all, place him upon the retired list of old fogies, to whom poor Lord John so obviously, in her eyes, belonged.

David Moore was too upright, too vigorous, and too good-looking to be treated with such contumely.

He was very thin, and his lean brown face was deeply lined; but that was due to the hardships of war, she decided, and not to old age; for there was not a grey hair in his black moutache, nor in the crisp, short locks cropped close to his head, yet obstinately curling, nor in the marked black brows which met across the bridge of his straight nose.

When he laughed, which was rather often—a low, amused, sincere laugh, which made her feel inclined to join without knowing why—he showed square, even, white teeth, and screwed up his eyelids in what Philippa felt to be a very engaging manner. When he was not laughing she liked his face better still; and the frankness of his expression and the softness of his handsome orange-brown eyes pleased and attracted her greatly.

The thought that he was a real live hero also sent a pleasant thrill down Philippa's backbone; for she was, after all, a very simple country maiden and her enthusiasms were fresh and wholesome.

Colonel Moore had no idea that those downcast eyes beneath Philippa's shady garden-hat were observing him, none the less that they seemed intent upon the lawn, or the tea-table, or Lady Adelstane's lace dress; but he looked not infrequently at her, for, indeed, her face was sufficiently attractive to arrest the attention of a man less susceptible than he to the influence of beauty.

On a certain April morning many years ago David Moore had gone primrosing in the Bridescombe Woods with Philippa's mother, when she had been hardly older than Philippa was now. He tried to trace a resemblance between his shadowy recollections of that gentle companion

of a bygone day and the handsome, vigorous maiden before him, but he found none.

"So that is Catherine's child," thought David, and felt a little tenderly towards Philippa for her mother's sake, and for the sake of that faint, isolated memory of that mother's youth; and perhaps also for her own, since the heart must be hard indeed that is not touched and softened by that first innocent loveliness of a woman-child, not yet awakened to the knowledge of her own charm or her own power.

George Chilcott walked home with his brother-in-law, leaving Clara at the parsonage, where she proposed that they should join her in calling upon the vicar's wife, who, she argued, could not be out at this late hour of the afternoon.

Since they declined her invitation with much warmth and determination, nothing was left her but to pay her visit alone, which she proceeded to do, and no sooner were they freed from her presence than a perceptible sense of ease and relief stole over both men.

At the lych-gate of the churchyard George hesitated, and said to his companion, "I generally go the short cut through this place and the fields when I'm alone," and David nodded without a word.

He had been there already since his arrival at Bridescombe.

The grass was very long, and the stone flags of the old lychway through the churchyard much overgrown. George walked in front, and David followed, and both men stopped before a cleared space, surrounded by a railing, wherein a plain sarcophagus stood, half buried in the blossom of carefully tended summer flowers.

The inscription to "Delia, beloved wife of George Chilcott," was discernible, and the date of a Christmas ten years past.

Close by there stood a plainer stone, whereon the name of George's father, Admiral Hector Chilcott, and his seventy-seven years of honoured, blameless life were recorded; and above both monuments towered the broken column which marked the tomb of Sir Philip Adelstane, called from a full and useful life in the prime of manhood; but George and David saw only that sacred place where youth and love and beauty lay low in Delia's grave.

Neither man spoke, nor did either so much as look at the other; but when George walked on, and David followed, both knew that that silent pilgrimage expressed a bond of mutual sorrow and brotherhood which could only have been weakened in intensity by spoken words.

CHAPTER III

"I MUST apologise for being obliged to receive you in my bedroom, my dear Catherine," said old Lady Sarah, "but I gathered from your note that you wanted to talk to me alone, and this is the only spot in the house where we may be sure of a comfortable chat without interruption from Augusta. When I arrive (and she has the bad taste, if you will believe me, to give me a different room in my old home every time I come) my first care, like the governor of a besieged castle, is to survey my fortifications, and decide how best to strengthen them. You will perceive I have had the fourposter moved in front of the main entrance, so that even Augusta would find it difficult to burst in upon me that way."

"She would indeed," said Catherine, observing the carven pillars of the seventeenth-century couch.

"And Tailer sits on guard in the dressing-room, with my sweet little Mumbo Jumbo, who has orders to bite every intruder except you, my love."

"You are very kind to make me the exception," said Catherine, smiling.

She had intended to consult Lady Sarah, and pondered how best she could approach the subject of Philippa; but Lady Sarah had a way of forestalling confidences which was almost disconcerting in its suddenness.

"Well, my love, so here is Philippa a woman, and you in difficulties, as I always said you would be, when you chose to bring up the sole hope of the Adelstanes in the back kitchen of a labourer's cottage."

"If I had but known she was to be the sole hope of the Adelstanes," said Catherine, rather sadly, "I do not think I would have brought her up here at all."

"You might have known, my love, for I always told you Augusta would never give Cecil an heir. She has never been known to do anything useful in her life that I am aware of. And so Philippa is discontented and rebellious, and you can do nothing with her and are at your wits' end."

"It is not so bad as that, I hope," said Catherine, colouring.

"Augusta makes it out quite as bad as that," said Lady Sarah, rather maliciously.

"Augusta can know nothing—nothing," cried Catherine warmly, "of anything between my Phil and me. Why, she has hardly been here since Philippa was twelve years old. I have not breathed a word to her, and I am sure Phil

wouldn't. She may have her faults, but disloyalty is not one of them."

"I am never sure of anything except that where Augusta is concerned mischief will hatch itself," said Lady Sarah cheerfully. "I can assure you that when I was foolish enough to invite her to my nutshell in Curzon Street, because her own house was unavailable for some cause or other, she spent at least six hours a day during her visit scribbling every detail of my household concerns and my disreputable doings and sayings to all her dearest friends. Bless me, how quickly I turned my spare room into a lumber closet after I found her out. I shall like to see her face, my love, when I tell her that I have inquired into your differences with Philippa, of which she was kind enough to inform me, and that I find there is not a word of truth in the report from beginning to end."

"But there is a word of truth in it," said Catherine, her cheeks flushed and her eyes filled with tears; she drew her low chair closer to Lady Sarah's fauteuil.

"Did I not tell you Augusta was a dangerous friend?" said Lady Sarah nodding, "It is the word of truth that makes her dangerous. There is no detail of fact which she cannot interpret to your disadvantage if she wishes to do so; and yet, do you know, Catherine, astonishing as it seems, I don't believe she means it."

"I am quite sure she does not," said Catherine. "I blame myself often for being hard upon her in my thoughts, though I am not so——"

"Prejudiced?" suggested Lady Sarah.

"Well, perhaps, not so prejudiced as you are," said Catherine, smiling apologetically.

"Augusta has a kind of surface good nature which imposes upon—people in general," said Lady Sarah, nodding again.

"Philippa has taken one of her violent fancies for Augusta," said Catherine, with a rather melancholy laugh. "I dare say it will not last. She is always wild about some one now. I don't know what to make of it."

"Philippa is exactly like I was at her age, a headstrong young woman, uncommonly fond of her own way, and you have spoilt her excessively, my love. Dear me, what battles I had with my poor mother; but I never got the better of her, I must own. She was a very determined person, and not at all like you, my sweet Catherine. As for Philippa, she will get over all these preliminary adorations the first time she falls in love. Pray Heaven it may be the right man. When I fell in love it was head over ears, and I should have married poor Philip whether he liked it or not, I can assure you. Indeed, I have never been so very certain that he *did* like it. However, Philippa is not likely to marry any one against his will, for she is not so clever as I was, my dear,

and is in fact a thorough Adelstane at heart, in spite of her resemblance to her poor old grand-dame. It is certain that the Adelstane ice will gradually freeze the warm blood of the Walderseas, which flows in her veins and mine. And no one has ever accused an Adelstane of cleverness so far as I am aware. However, they are good-looking and remarkably healthy; you can't have everything," said Lady Sarah, indulgently.

"Cecil is very wise in his way. I know no one whose judgment I rely on more," said Catherine, loyally.

"Just so, and clever people are hardly ever wise. That is why I am thankful that my descendants turned out dull. Though it is very odd that they should," said Lady Sarah, with a frisky laugh. "Far better for me than if I had had the misfortune to bring forth a genius, who would probably have revenged himself for my maternal devotion by revealing eventually to the world his full impressions of the mistakes I made in his education, with comments upon all my little weaknesses thrown in."

"Oh, Lady Sarah!"

"Well, my love, I am supposing my genius to be a writer; and what is an author, after all, but an indiscreet person who can't keep his thoughts to himself? If he were any other kind of genius it would be even worse, for then his friends would certainly set to work to write his

biography, and scratch up or invent the most unpleasant details to make it as spicy as possible. But, however, as I was saying, my sons were anything but geniuses. They had the good luck to be as wise as they were dull, which is saying a great deal. The wise man, you see, my love, does not drink nor gamble, nor live beyond his income, nor run away with his neighbour's wife; and the clever man is by no means exempt from these possibilities. I was more clever than wise, so I got into not a few scrapes in my day. However, if my wits led me into them, they always got me out of them. I dare say Augusta has told you the most shocking histories, my love."

"Do you think I would listen if she did?"

"Poor Cecil has had to listen, willy-nilly. He has never had the same respect for me since he married. Nor for any one else, so far as that goes. She has stripped away every illusion he may ever have cherished regarding the members of his own family, or of hers, long since. But to return to our muttons, or in this case our little ewe lamb, without accusing *her* of dulness"—Lady Sarah's bright eyes twinkled—"though she is a trifle spoilt, she has not the kind of cleverness, my love, which leads a girl into mischief, and so you can be quite easy about her."

This assurance neither gratified nor convinced Philippa's mother.

"And therefore," said Lady Sarah, very coolly,

"I am much inclined, Catherine, to advise you to give the child her way. Let her accept this invitation, and go up to town with Augusta for a few weeks."

"With Augusta! You advise me to confide my child to her, after——"

"After all the abuse I have been showering upon her, you would like to say? But, my dear Catherine, as you remarked just now, I am perhaps prejudiced against Cecil's wife," said Lady Sarah, adroitly.

"One may be unprejudiced, and yet unable to respect Augusta's methods," said Catherine, almost angrily, "and my Philippa—who is as open as the day—how could she——"

"But that is one of my principal reasons, my love. Mothers are so very short-sighted. If you want our beloved Philippa to find out *your* merits, let her toddle off under Augusta's care. An ounce of experience is worth a pound of theory. It will do her no harm to be let out of leading strings, for, as I tell you, she is an Adelstane at heart, and she will bore Augusta to death in a week. A girl of that age, full of high-flown illusions, embarrasses herself and everybody else," said Lady Sarah, chuckling. "She will be *reléguée* to the back drawing-room in a day or two, if I'm not mistaken, and be glad enough to come home, and to make her *début* next year, under your wing, with my assistance; though Augusta very

kindly hints to me that I am becoming a trifle superannuated."

"I had always hoped you would help me; but must it be next year?" said Catherine, dismally. "She is only sixteen."

"When I was her age," said Lady Sarah, rather contemptuously, "I had refused an excellent offer of marriage already, and though my godmother left me a fortune I was no such heiress as Philippa will be. I fell in love only six months after with Philip Adelstane and married him on the spot. My grandmother, Lady Jane Waldersea, was married at fifteen, had twelve children, and lived to be a hundred years old. I do not agree at all with these namby-pamby modern notions of prolonging a girl's childhood indefinitely. Philippa is none of your nervous anæmic blue-stockings, grown round-shouldered and short-sighted with poring over her lessons."

"No, indeed," said Catherine. "My only fear is that I have thought, if anything, too much of her health and too little of her education. But she dislikes books, has no taste for drawing, and no ear for music. What was I to do?"

"Why must every female creature be bound to thump a pianoforte? In my opinion, if women want to get on in life the less they learn the better. A learned woman is like Cain, every man's hand is against her," said Lady Sarah, chuckling. "Philippa can read and write, and speak English

like a lady, and French like an Englishwoman. She can play games and ride straight to hounds, and has a good disposition. She is a fine strapping, healthy creature, formed by nature to be the mother of fine, healthy, beautiful children. What more do you want? What more need any man ask for, I should like to know? She ought to come out next year and marry in her first season, as I did. Pray, am I one penny the worse for it? And if this preliminary canter makes her less *farouche* or, if you will excuse me, my sweet Catherine, knocks a little of the family priggishness out of her, we shall have every reason to be thankful to Augusta."

"And I said I would be guided by you," said Catherine despairingly. "Oh, Lady Sarah, do—do be serious. Think that I have only Philippa in the world."

"And how much longer do you expect to keep her all to yourself, pray?"

"At least till she marries, and I need not lose her altogether then."

"To be sure. Yes, yes. I can see the son-in-law you have in your mind's eye," said Lady Sarah derisively. "Not too old, and not too young. A serious, careful person to whom you can confide your opinion of the careful treatment her health and disposition require, and who can be trusted to look after her like any old woman, and see that she does not get her feet wet in summer, or leave off her warm vests in winter. Mothers are perfect

fools, my dear Catherine. Philippa will live her own life, and buy her own experience as dearly as possible, and her husband will do just what she chooses, and will never discuss her with any one, least of all with her mamma. Bless me, my love, how warm it is! I believe I shall have to go downstairs and sit under the trees on the lawn. Augusta purposely chose me a room with a western aspect (a thing I can't bear) to force me out of it every afternoon."

Catherine was obliged to accept this somewhat decisive hint that her interview with Lady Sarah was at an end. She had wished for advice and had received it, and found it as unpalatable as advice must always be when it clashes with the seeker's own inclinations.

But there was no one else to whom she felt inclined to turn for counsel. George Chilcott, it is true, managed her business affairs, and gave her sage and excellent directions concerning them, but she could never speak to him from her heart. He was but a kind, honest dullard, whose converse was strictly limited to what he would have termed the practical realities of existence. Of the life of the spirit, the thoughts and ideas which survive through the ages whilst men and matter alike perish, he knew and cared nothing at all. The things he could see were real to him, the rest did not exist. He went to church regu-

larly, and tried to keep his reverent attention fixed on words which bored him very much, though he would have died sooner than admit this even to himself; and he did his duty to the best of his ability as a brave, clean, honest man, imbued with the best English public school and army traditions. Catherine found him more practical and better informed on gardening and farming subjects than Sir Cecil, but there her companionship with him ended. There was no one—there had never been any one—to whom she had spoken her inmost thoughts. Not Philippa—whom she loved best in the world, for whom she would have laid down her life without a sigh. In the midst of her idolatry for her only child, Catherine had wistfully recognised the absence of the higher and finer perceptions in Philippa. Sometimes she tried to persuade herself that these would develop with advancing age; but memories of her own childhood secretly nullified the hope.

It needed not the satirical comments of Lady Sarah to show her that her child was modelled upon the Adelstane type—when Sir Cecil, embodiment of all that was best in the race, was constantly before her eyes. Handsome and distinguished in feature, tall and dignified in person, with a manner perfectly well bred, courteous, and reserved—he had grown to resemble exactly, in the eyes of the world, his late uncle, Sir Philip.

But Lady Sarah never allowed this, and

Catherine was passionately grateful to her for her obstinacy in the matter.

"So is a clay model like a marble statue. Philip was made of finer stuff," said the old lady.

Catherine looked back through the mist of years to the noble figure which had dominated the imagination of her girlhood, and with all her might clung to her early ideal, and agreed with Lady Sarah, conquering that sad clearness of vision which creeps upon middle-age and destroys so many loved illusions.

When Philippa was born, Catherine looked no less eagerly into the future, and beheld already in her dreams the companion into which that human chrysalis would develop. She fancied herself singing songs and telling stories to an eager childish listener, and felt already little arms about her neck, and saw beautiful eyes looking intelligently into hers with answering fondness and understanding. But she did not realise that the little being of whom she thought was the ghost of her own childhood, and not the substantial living Philippa who lay sleeping in her cot; in whom the germs of the Adelstane character were already thriving healthily, and who would be neither a dreamer nor a sentimentalist, as Catherine had been, nor endowed with a spark of her mother's gentle humour.

Catherine, confounding imagination with reality, had thus let Philippa too soon into the temple

of her early and sacred memories. She had since had many a pained vision of the child flitting carelessly through that holy place, overthrowing idols, peering into dim recesses, and setting the door open for the sunlight of common sense to stream in and extinguish the shadowy twilight of fancy. Philippa dispersed all Catherine's tender expectations with light-hearted unconsciousness, being naturally altogether unaware of that imaginary self of hers—that little dream-child with serious face and pathetic eyes, who never was and never could be Philippa Adelstane.

Old Miss Dulcinea was a kind creature, gentle if rather foolish of disposition, but Catherine had long since discovered that the confidences of her friends formed the staple theme of Miss Dulcinea's conversation with any one who cared to listen; nor did they lose in the telling, for the kind old lady's loving embroideries of speech decorated, so to speak, the solid hours of many a *tête-à-tête* in shabby old drawing-rooms or stuffy cottage parlours, brightening dull lives, and not, perhaps, doing much harm to any one.

The knowledge of Miss Chilcott's weakness weighed upon Catherine, however, with a heaviness that might appear disproportionate save to those who have endured a similar minor trial of life. She was aware that, through this incessant leakage in her household, her most intimate concerns and smallest doings must needs be

babbled about an entire neighbourhood; but reproaches, though they wounded poor Miss Dulcinea's gentle heart, could not cure her; and Catherine could only retire into herself, guard her conversation, and be careful never to comment upon Philippa's shortcomings nor reprove her in Miss Dulcinea's presence; hiding the disappointment and anxiety which her child almost daily caused her as best she could. She learnt to *commune with her own heart* indeed, but to be *still*—how infinitely more difficult was that! To wait patiently for developments—to trust God and live in the present, instead of fretting over the possible troubles of an unknown future.

CHAPTER IV

In these early days of a backward June, Nature had withheld the fulfilment of her yearly promise, only to pour it out the more lavishly at last.

The homestead at Shepherd's Rest was embowered in blossom.

The scented honeysuckle hung trails of yellow trumpets over the west corner of the porch; the east was heavily curtained by the Montana clematis, studded with white stars.

The open window of Catherine's bedroom was framed with early roses—the faint coppery hue of the *Idéal* soaring ever upward as though seeking to bear its burden of flower as near heaven as possible; and the clusters of the little innocent-faced Banksia, content to clothe itself in beauty from stem to point.

A sturdy wistaria embraced the north wall, flung its purple bunches over the roof, and dangled them around the eaves; no ruthless gardener was here permitted to prune its natural luxuriance or lop its graceful growth.

On the edge of the little wood which sheltered the garden from the east, the laburnum swung

golden drops in the light summer wind over the tall foxgloves; above the laburnum rose the dark fir-trees, but spring had tipped the myriad points of their sombre foliage with delicate new pale green.

In the open meadows and orchard lands which lay to the west the hedges were white with may, and the air was filled with the fragrance of it; the red Devon cattle, motionless and drowsy, dropped their heads among the seeding grasses; the buttercups glowed in the sunshine, and the wild hyacinths made the shadows yet more purple beneath the branching apple-trees.

Gaily the tulips and the painted pansies bloomed in the little garden, where the turquoise blue of a cloudless sky was reflected in whole forests of forget-me-not, springing round the stems of the standard rose trees.

The oak parlour of the cottage, cool, rose-scented, was shaded by outside blinds from the blinding sunshine.

Here the hands of David and Catherine met and clasped; they looked curiously at each other across the experience of half a lifetime.

The first thought of each was that the other had changed very greatly. Catherine perceived that the merry careless boy had developed into a strong and splendid manhood.

Colonel Moore was obviously fitted by nature to be a leader of men; tall and powerful of build,

alert and steady of glance, with the clear eyes that bore witness to a temperate life, as his lean muscular figure argued an active one.

"He is quick, and generous and sympathetic as Delia," thought Catherine, and her heart beat pleasantly with quickened interest.

David saw only the soft and gentle face of a woman whose youth was past; brown hair with silver threads in it, parted above a low, broad brow; a sweet mouth rather humorous, and hazel eyes rather wistful. The quiet, grey-clad figure of a woman whose best days of love and life had departed—whilst his were yet to come; the dearest friend of his dead sister's bright youth; the widow of Sir Philip Adelstane—a personage he had once regarded with awe—and the mother of Philippa.

But, though their thoughts were many, their greetings were commonplace.

"So we meet again."

"How good of you to come so soon."

"I haven't seen you, Catherine, since you were—well—about the age your pretty daughter is now."

"No," said Catherine gently. "I was always sorry you did not come down here when you were last in England."

"I spent my leave in London with—Delia. She was never fond of the country."

"No, never. But she wished George to live here."

"Because she knew his heart was in his home. It was a pity George gave up the service when she died; but I suppose his duty lay here."

"Oh, David, it is the life he is best fitted for," said Catherine. "When they used to come down here for a few days from town, it was pitiful to see how his heart was set on the place; he used to ramp and rage like an angry lion, Delia told me, over his mother's mismanagement. And yet he wouldn't hear of Delia's giving up London and coming here altogether."

"No, no, he couldn't go back on his word like that," said David. "Delia had always stipulated for London; what could *she* have done down here? And, after all, they were very happy while it lasted—happier than most couples. The pity of it is that it should have lasted so short a time. Hardly seven years."

Catherine thought of her own happiness, which had lasted a shorter time yet, and sighed.

"Are you down there much?" said David abruptly.

He moved restlessly about the little oak-panelled room, taking two chairs from their proper places and resting in neither. His dark head almost touched the heavy centre beam which crossed the parlour.

"Not very much," said Catherine. Then, as though excusing herself: "It is not far as the crow flies, but it's a steep climb, and I am always

busy. Phil runs up and down a good deal, and little Lily finds her way up here when she is allowed, which, to be sure, is not very often."

"That's what I wanted to talk to you about. I don't think old Mrs. Chilcott's influence is good for little Lily," said David, and he settled himself at last, with an air of relief, in an arm-chair, and looked expectantly at Catherine. There was an eager certainty of sympathy in his sunshiny, orange-brown eyes that reminded her sadly, yet pleasurably, of her lost beloved friend; so that she could not feel him to be a stranger, and she prepared herself unconsciously to give him all the sympathy he needed.

A whole-hearted, spontaneous unreserve with those whom she loved or trusted, or with whom she found herself in sympathy, had been one of Delia's most charming characteristics. The instinctive choice of a *confidante* counts for much with such natures, and Delia had not often been betrayed; David perhaps never, though his was the simpler nature, the greater heart, of the two.

"She wanted George to come back, because she knew he would find his only consolation when she was gone in Bridescombe," he said. "But she hadn't time to think of everything——"

"Ah, she was so quick—so quick of thought; she *had* time," Catherine just breathed the words, with a little shake of her head.

"You wrote to me—it was very good of you—

and told me all poor old George couldn't say," he responded instantly, leaning forward. "But tell me now again, by word of mouth; one can say so much more than in a letter."

"There were but three days after Lily was born," said Catherine. "But when she knew she had to go—she was as brave as——"

"As Delia would be," he said proudly, with the unshed tears glittering in the brown eyes fixed on Catherine's moved face.

"In her quick way she made up her mind that little Lily would be herself over again, and had no fears for leaving her; she thought more of Hector, whom she worshipped. 'My boy will be at school,' she said, 'and his Granny won't have much of a chance to bully him, and he's not the sort to care if she did. But she won't, he's too like George. And *my* daughter'—I can hear her laugh now—'will be able to hold her own. George could never bear to live in London alone, and the country will be better for the children. They must go back.' She thought, too, that her death and having her grandchildren all to herself would soften old Mrs. Chilcott."

"Well, it hasn't," said David shortly. "And the other woman, Clara, is intolerable. Between them they make the child's life a burden to her."

"Is it so bad as that?" said Catherine, with startled eyes. "Oh, surely no."

"Yes, it is as bad as that."

"And George hasn't found it out?"

David's glance rested on her with an expression of mingled scorn, affection, and amusement. "George!" he said.

"I know she is a quiet little thing," said Catherine humbly, "but many children are quiet. I have always thought little Lily just the child—I should have liked. She follows me about with her great black eyes questioning; always gentle and serious."

"I should like to take her away," said David, half angrily. "She has no business to be serious at ten years old."

"Oh, David," said Catherine, almost tearfully, "is it possible that you in a few days have found out that Delia's little girl is unhappy; and that I, a woman and a mother too, have been so selfish, so thoughtless as not to find it out?"

"Oh, well, it is natural you should be absorbed in your own child," he said apologetically. "And besides, you haven't stayed in the house with her. I have, even if only for a few days."

"I will confess the truth," said Catherine, and her lip trembled. "I *do* avoid going to Bridescombe. I—I—have said nothing about it to anyone."

"Much better speak out," said David, unceremoniously.

"But each time I go there I vow to myself it shall be the last."

"That old woman's tongue would make any one feel the same," said David, grimly, "but I sha'n't leave till I've got the better of her so far as my little Lily is concerned. I don't see, though, how anything she says can affect *you*."

"If I were not foolish and weak, I suppose it would not," said Catherine, vehemently accusing herself. "But I will own to you, David, that I come back after an interview with her shaking in every limb. I can't sleep at night for thinking of what she said and how she said it. The bad motives she imputes to every one. The—the way she scoffs at the things one thought one was doing of wise and sensible." Catherine's English was apt, in moments of excitement, to recur to the translations of her Anglo-French childhoood. "She makes one's peaceful, busy life seem somehow only futile and silly, and one loses confidence in oneself and one's plans. Perhaps you, being a man, can hardly understand such weakness, and yet I think you can, and do—for you are very like Delia. Oh, David, I miss her still, after all these years, for I never had a friend before, and I shall never have one again."

A tear fell on to Catherine's little slender hands, clasped in the lap of her grey gown. She wore always grey or black, with soft blendings of white, very dainty and spotless, and perhaps the simplicity of her gowns helped to keep some shadow of her lost youth about her still.

Hers was not a face that had ever been beautiful, save for a pair of fine hazel eyes, and a certain purity of colouring. It was not beautiful now, but the serene and healthful life she had led in the mild air of the Devon hills had stolen but little of her early freshness of tint, though the face was paler, and the regard perhaps less bright.

The eyes of middle-age are often but ghosts of their former selves; robbed of their brilliance, of their curved and pointed length of lashes, of their clear blue whites, and their setting of smooth brow and glowing cheek; the little windows of the soul grow dimmer with the passing of the years. But at five and thirty Catherine's hazel eyes were yet beautiful enough, and the soul looked forth from them with the almost childish gentleness and wistfulness that David remembered in the charming maiden who had gone primrosing with him on that far-off April day.

"You have a friend in me, now and always. I think you know that," he answered her, as impulsively as Delia herself would have spoken and with as little self-consciousness. "And if *you* miss Delia, what about me? You see," he went on unsteadily, "there were only us two, and when she went—I knew there wasn't a soul on earth who *really* cared what became of me. I don't mean I haven't plenty of friends, but that's not the same thing. One's success or failure, one's sickness or one's health, isn't a matter of life or

death to one's friends, however devoted they are. There wasn't anything left for me—but work."

"You have done so splendidly," cried Catherine. "Oh, David, often and often I have thought—if Delia could only have heard this—if she could only have read that——"

"Aye, so have I," said David, simply enough. "But there it is. I'd nobody to telegraph my good news to; nobody whose pleasure in the show was the real thing one cared most about. But it's no use thinking of that," he went on more cheerfully. "I suppose there are any amount of old people, and not a few middle-aged ones, who know the sadness of a success when there's no one left to be pleased about it."

Catherine looked into her past, and found no one there to whom her success or failure had ever been a matter of life or death. But her sympathy was none the less with David, for she knew his sister had idolised him beyond every one and everything in the world.

"That's the worst of putting all one's eggs in one basket," he said, trying to laugh. "Ah, Catherine, you don't know what the blank of mail-day was to me, for years after Delia died. I don't believe she ever missed a mail, God bless her. Fellows who have lived ten years out of England at a stretch know what that means."

"Did the thought of her children comfort you a little?"

"I can't say it did," he returned frankly. "If anything, I felt a grudge against the poor atom who had been the innocent cause of—but now I've seen her, a little living reminder of Delia, of course it's different. Coming home has brought it all back, though, worse than I thought; and especially seeing poor George so miserable."

"He has never got over it," said Catherine, sympathetically.

"It isn't that," he said briefly.

She waited.

"Catherine, there's only one thing for George to do—he ought to marry again."

"*You* say that!"

"I am the only person who can say it, because I'm the only person who sees things as Delia would have seen them. George knows that."

"I can't help feeling—I am sure he would feel—that it would be unfaithful," she faltered.

"The dead cannot share our lives with us, however dear their memories are," said David. "One would become morbid and cowardly if one didn't fight one's sorrow and put it in the background of work and existence." He stopped short, for the wistful questioning in poor Catherine's eyes reminded him that she, too, was in something of the same position as George. He leant forward and took her hand gently. "It is very different for you. A woman's sorrow is a very sacred and beautiful thing," he said, with emotion. "But

George is a man, and has to live a man's life and do a man's work."

He released the little soft hand, and rose from his chair, once more restlessly pacing the low room.

"I can see what sort of an existence George has been leading for some years past. He came back listless and broken-hearted, and let his mother and sister say and do what they would. Old Aunt Lydia rules the house with a rod of iron, and Clara is her blind and stupid mouthpiece. If the child shows a flash of her mother's spirit, she is snubbed, and whatever she does or does not do she is nagged at from morning till night by Clara, who has kindly undertaken her education, and imagines herself the most devoted aunt in the world."

"Have you said anything?"

"I am too wise to waste my words. In their eyes, you know, I am still the presumptuous young man who ventured into the army when he ought to have looked for a three-legged stool in an office. I shall be a poor relation in the estimation of Aunt Lydia to the end of the chapter, just as George will always be a fashionable young Guardsman."

Catherine could not help a little low laugh.

"That is it, exactly. So am I a poor relation, though of course it is a hundred times more ridiculous in your case," she said, with her customary and quite unaffected humility.

"I don't see that."

"You don't see yourself," said Catherine, smiling. "But I am sure Aunt Lydia must be proud of you in her heart. I wish you had heard her boasting of you during the war to poor Mrs. Bell, whose son was a humble trooper in the yeomanry. She laid down the law so about the latest victories, and contradicted the newspaper accounts so flatly, that we thought she must be really quoting your letters."

"I never wrote to her from South Africa but once," said David, grimly, "to thank her for the one letter she wrote me."

"When you got your V.C.?"

"No, no. When I was taken prisoner," said David, smiling. "She wrote to tell me how very unlucky it was, and how they all felt for my mortification, and how much she hoped I had not been too severely blamed by the authorities."

"Why," cried Catherine, indignantly, "the papers were full of praise—you were dangerously wounded—you——"

"Oh, that was all right," said David. "I wrote from hospital, and thanked her kindly, and said I hoped I might live it down in time. The composition of that letter helped me and my friend Pollock—who lost his leg, poor chap, in the same action—through a weary time. You see, condolences are more in Aunt Lydia's line than congratulations. When I inherited my old

uncle's little fortune, she was as mum as a stockfish; and I remember poor Delia writing that neither Aunt Lydia nor Clara could rest at night for anxiety lest my unexpected good luck should turn my head."

"But how glad Delia was. She was always saying, 'Now David can exchange into the cavalry; now he can keep polo ponies; now he can rise as high as he will—if only he doesn't get married'—and you didn't get married," said Catherine.

"No, no, I am not a marrying man," said David, colouring and laughing. "It is George who ought to find a wife. I want to get him to come up to town with me, directly I've found rooms and got into harness at the War Office. Once there, it will be easy enough. There must be plenty of pretty young ladies about, and George knows lots of people, though I don't."

Catherine smiled; but, quick as he was, David did not divine the cause of her smile.

"Are you sure that for little Lily it would not be jumping out of the frying-pan into the fire? Why should an unknown stepmother be better for her than Clara?"

"Anybody would be better than Clara," said David, decidedly, "anybody young and nice and sympathetic."

"Suppose he caught a tartar?"

"That would be unfortunate, certainly."

"You know George does rather lend himself

to—I don't mean he isn't manly enough," said Catherine, hesitating, "but—Delia did just what she liked with him."

"Oh, I know he's one of those good-natured fellows who are always led by the nose by some woman or other," said David. "That's why it's so obvious he ought to marry. It's more natural that a wife should boss him than his mamma and sister; and then they could be off to Cheltenham or Bath and leave him in peace. That was to have been the programme eventually if poor Delia had lived. And perhaps then, Catherine," his brown eyes softened, "they would spare little Lily to me now and then. "She's the only creature in the world who seems to me a little bit like Delia. I don't feel drawn to Hector in the same way, though he's a fine lad. I went to see him at Eton."

"He and Philippa are just of an age."

"A boy is one thing and a girl is another. Philippa is ten years older than that young cub for all practical purposes."

"Did you think her pretty?" asked Catherine, timidly.

"Pretty! I have seen nothing half so beautiful for many a long day."

Catherine's heart warmed with this unaccustomed enthusiasm.

"It must be very dull for her in this out-of-the way place, though," said David. "How much longer are you going to keep her mewed up here?"

"Why, that is the question," said Catherine, and she tried to laugh, but her eyes grew misty. "She thinks it very hard she should be mewed up here at all."

"So it is. She ought to see something of the world, and it's high time she began. It's not fair to a pretty girl to let her grow rustic and awkward by keeping her out of every one's way."

"Augusta wants to take her to London when she returns."

"An excellent plan."

"But I'm not sure that I care to trust her with Augusta," said Catherine, uneasily.

"Why, what harm could come to her in Lady Adelstane's hands? She's a good-natured creature, surely? And Cecil Adelstane is a kind of pillar of the British Constitution."

"I know I'm foolish—but I—I never have been parted from her yet," said Catherine, wistfully. "She's all I've got."

"I see," said David, gently. "Well, but why not go up to town with her yourself?"

She hesitated and stammered. How could she tell David that it was Philippa who did not wish her mother to come?

Catherine, looking at Delia's brother, thought that here was the friend she had unconsciously sought, full of sympathy and understanding and gentleness. She felt a great longing to confide in David. But Philippa was sacred—she could not

speak of her. She thought to herself, however, that if David were really like Delia he would understand her trouble without words, so far as a man could understand; she made this reservation timidly, as one whose experience of mankind had been very limited.

"Of course I would prefer to take her myself to London," she faltered, "but——"

"I expect you feel you've dropped out of it all—living here in seclusion for so many years," he said kindly.

"It's not that altogether. I never was in it," said Catherine, very honestly. "I went where they took me, of course—my husband and Lady Sarah. But it was among *their* friends and acquaintances; they never really became mine. If I had been"—she smiled—"as beautiful as a houri, as witty as a geisha, and as faultless as an angel, I doubt if they would ever have been interested in me."

"Wouldn't they!" said David, laughing, "that is—I am not sure about the angel!"

"No—for there was something in me that wouldn't let me be interested in them. Interest must be mutual. I always longed to creep away into a corner. I suppose it is some defect in my constitution. I think I have always liked things better than people. Things real or abstract. Work and dreaming and books and out-of-doors always pleased me best. I always longed for a

little life of my own—and here I am, you see, living it."

"But that is rather hard on Philippa."

"Yes," said Catherine, blankly, "I suppose it is —rather hard on Philippa."

There was a pause.

"Of course, I know I must make an effort one day to take her out in London—however unsuited I am," said Catherine, almost faintly. "But since she is only sixteen, and such a baby—*such* a baby—for her age."

"She looks twenty; and it won't be any easier to begin a year or two hence than it is now," said David, drily.

"What would *you* advise me to do?" said Catherine, suddenly.

He considered.

"Perhaps it is not fair to ask you to take the responsibility of advising me," she faltered.

He looked at her in amused surprise.

"I don't mind accepting the responsibility. A man can only give the best advice in his power. I think you ought to let your daughter go. Why should she suffer because you have chosen to live in seclusion all these years? No doubt the Adelstanes can give her many advantages; they know everybody—and are, after all, her nearest relations. But of course if there is any reason why you should not think it advisable to trust her to Lady Adelstane—it would be far better to take her yourself."

Catherine hesitated. "No, there is nothing—I can't say there is anything. Augusta is perhaps—not a very sincere person."

"Women seldom are very sincere, I suppose," said David, calmly.

Catherine did not agree with him, but she was not in the habit of contradicting the superior sex, and he took her meek silence for consent.

"I think you take it rather seriously," he said, cheerfully. "After all, if you feel it so much as all that, it would certainly be best to go up with her yourself."

"I would like to," said Catherine, "but—" she faltered again. She could not tell David that in Philippa's eyes all the charm of the expedition would vanish if her mother accompanied her; that the child had grown restless and discontented under her perpetual tender supervision.

But as she hesitated Philippa herself opened the door of the parlour, and innocently saved Catherine all further trouble of explanation. Her handsome face was flushed and heated, and her bright hair ruffled, as usual, about her ears. She wore a plain blue linen frock, which defined her tall, full, slender figure, and fell just below her ankles in rather scanty folds.

She looked so fair and noble, with her straight features and brilliant colouring, all lit up, as it were, with sunshine and youth and gladness, that Catherine stole a glance at David, full of

pride and pleasure, wondering whether he too would be affected by the beauty of this radiant vision.

With the quickness of childhood, Philippa detected her mother's embarassment, and divined the cause.

"You have been asking Cousin David's advice, mamma," she said eagerly. "Oh, Cousin David, do, *do* beg her not to spoil all my fun by coming up to London, and stopping in a poky lodging or a horrid hotel, just to keep an eye on me. You know she's far happier here, and I do so long to try just for once in a way what it would be like to go and pay a visit all by myself, like any other girl, and to stay with dear, dear, kind Cousin Augusta."

Catherine looked anxiously at David to see how he would take this revelation, to her so tragic, of Philippa's wish to leave her; but she perceived only laughter and admiration in his brown eyes.

Colonel Moore thought it the most natural thing in the world that a pretty girl should pine for a little freedom and pleasure, and a taste of the gaieties suitable to her age.

Catherine realised instantly with a curious pang of mingled surprise, pain, and amusement that, though David was of her own generation, he was nevertheless both by sympathy and instinct not on her side but Philippa's in this matter.

CHAPTER V

THOUGH Lady Sarah Adelstane had called her grandson Cecil a wise man, and though he was undoubtedly a rich one, he was nevertheless living beyond his income; and the fact made him irritable in the daytime and wakeful at night.

Like many men who have married women with fortunes, he personally benefited very little from his wife's wealth, whilst she made it a perpetual excuse for getting everything she wanted.

Since he had entered upon his inheritance of his uncle's fortune, Welwysbere Abbey had been put into perfect order and repair; modern drainage and electric lighting had been installed, and elaborate new stabling had been erected. Reflecting upon the largeness of his wife's income, he had paid off every mortgage upon the property out of his own capital, rebuilt farms and cottages, and bought coveted adjacent land.

All these works being accomplished—and they were the happy occupation of years—Sir Cecil found his remaining income not more than sufficient to support the army of dependents requisite for the maintenance of his splendid residence,

and he naturally turned to his wife for that assistance which her fortune rendered her able to afford. At first all had gone very well, but, as the owner of a country house who entertains is generally obliged to discover, expenses are apt to multiply with years, as dependents rather incline to increase than to dwindle in numbers. Lady Adelstane had never been accustomed to spend much time in the country, and when she grew tired of her husband's West Country paradise she discovered that it hurt her health to remain there. She found small difficulty in persuading her physician to back her opinion; Sir Cecil was told that the Abbey was damp and the climate depressing, and that it would be highly prejudicial to his wife's health to remain there against her will. Had arguments been wanting, the fact that Augusta attributed her failure to produce an heir entirely to the relaxing qualities of the West Country air would have convinced her husband of the necessity for leaving it. It spite of the constantly increasing population of the village, he was willing to believe his wife and the doctors, and travelled with her all over Europe in search of the fecundity which nature had denied.

During the intervals of travel, Lady Adelstane entertained her friends in town very lavishly, for she had purchased a fine house in Belgrave Square; but, as she not only paid for the lease but for the plenishing of this mansion, she pointed out to her

husband that in common fairness he should buy the yacht upon which she had set her heart. Sir Cecil was conscious of imprudence, but, instead of reminding his wife that he had neither desired nor advised the purchase of a town house, he complied with her request, making the less demur because he was passsionately fond of the sea.

This life afforded Lady Adelstane the perpetual distraction for which her soul craved. Being continuously hospitable at home and abroad, she and her husband became a very popular couple. If Sir Cecil were intimate with no one, he had innumerable acquaintances and was respected by them all; and if Augusta's violent friendships lasted but a short time—why, a woman in her position can afford to be capricious, and new friends succeeded old ones with obliging facility, nor did the supply show any signs of being likely to fail.

Her perpetual amiability, her infantile dimples, her extravagant attire, and incessant babble rendered her rather attractive for a short time; and, though her selfishness must become evident upon closer acquaintance, it readily escaped notice in a world which is only too willing to take people as it finds them on the surface.

But whilst his wife's cherubic countenance remained smooth in spite of the passing of years, Sir Cecil's handsome face acquired a careworn and harassed expression.

Beyond all earthly things he loved the Abbey; but he sometimes wondered painfully whether it were worth while to maintain an establishment so costly for the sake of a few weeks' occasional residence at Welwysbere, whilst his actual existence was spent in London, Scotland, and the Mediterranean. A secret consolation dawned upon him when he perceived that Philippa shared his love for the Abbey, and his pride in the estate that had been in the possession of the Adelstanes for so many generations.

Catherine had desired that her child should not be informed of the possibility of her succession to the ownership of Welwysbere, and Sir Cecil had scrupulously respected this desire; but now that the possibility had become a probability, and that Philippa was so nearly grown up, it was tacitly understood that it was well she should be brought to a sense of her future responsibilities, and Augusta talked openly of the festivities that must be organised for Philippa's coming of age.

Catherine feared her daughter might be led to think too much of her own importance, and strove by private warnings of her own to modify Philippa's expectations.

"You know, darling, nothing is certain in this world."

"Why, mamma, I am the last of the Adelstanes. Of course I know it won't be for years and years —I hope not. But the Abbey must belong to

me some day, or to my children," added Miss Philippa calmly.

"Your cousin Cecil is quite a young man," then, as Philippa smiled, "well, middle-aged. A thousand things might happen; he may yet have heirs of his own——"

"Oh, mamma, they have been married eighteen years. Roper says it's *most* improbable."

"Roper had no business to mention such things to you."

"I'm not a baby," said Philippa, pouting. "Every one but you knows that, mamma, and people talk quite differently to me when you're not listening. I know why you're afraid, mamma: you think the notion of the Abbey being my very own will turn my head, and make me want it whilst Cousin Cecil is still alive. But you're quite wrong. I don't want to settle down there a bit until I'm quite old and have been all over the world, and enjoyed myself for years. Though, of course, I like to know it *will* be mine; and so it ought, for, after all, it belonged to my father, and if it hadn't been for the horrid old entail you and I would be living there now."

"I would far rather be living here," said Catherine.

"I wouldn't, then. I love the Abbey and this is horrid in some ways. I always feel ashamed when callers come and there is no proper drawing-room," said Philippa, who was conventional to

her finger-tips. "Of course I don't mean," she added relenting, "that I'm not fond of this place, and don't know it's pretty and all that, but I don't like to live in a farmhouse, and I feel much more at home in the Abbey."

"But it isn't your home, Phil, and I hope you will keep before you the possibility that you may never inherit at all. Even if Augusta has no children, she might not live for ever—I don't like to say such things, but I must—Cousin Cecil might marry again, and have sons——"

"Of course, I know *that*," said Philippa, impatiently. "I might die myself, all sorts of things *might* happen. You always throw cold water on everything, mamma," she said in an injured tone.

Catherine abandoned her arguments in despair.

Now that the owners had returned to the Abbey for Whitsuntide, both mother and daughter were constantly invited there; for Augusta appealed to Catherine to assist her in the entertainment of Lady Sarah, whilst Philippa asked nothing better than to follow Augusta wherever she went.

"Between grandmamma's age and her eccentricity, it is growing frightfully difficult to know what to do with her," Augusta complained to Catherine. "I got Lord John down on purpose to amuse her, for really he is a man I care nothing about and one of the dullest people in the world, thinking of nothing but eating and drinking;

so I thought they would potter about together. But no such thing; he has taken to going round the golf links with Grace Trumoin; so that I scarcely get a word with her, though you know what chums we are."

"She is very charming," said Catherine.

"I am so glad you like her; I am quite devoted to her," said Augusta, beaming. "She and I have so much in common. We both adore yachting, and we have some mutual friends we can't bear. I always think that a great bond. Well, I see next to nothing of her, what with her golfing all day and bridging all night. And there is really no excuse for her taking any notice of Lord John, for every one knows he hasn't a penny in the world."

"Still, you have your sister," said Catherine, soothingly.

"I don't want to say anything against Blanche," said Augusta, discontentedly "but you know how it is with one's family. One can never please them, do what one will. As I always say, scratch a relation and find an enemy."

"You can't expect your relations to like being scratched," said Catherine, laughing outright. "And you must own she is very good-natured, Augusta."

"I don't say she isn't," said Augusta, resignedly, "I am sure the way she humours poor Bob Ralt is quite touching. Such a fifth-rate man as he

turned out to be after all, with quite impossible relations. It is really a little hard on one for one's sister to make such a marriage. What she saw in him I never could make out, except that he has a very fine property, but Blanche is far too senseless to be influenced by a solid reason like that for liking a man. Besides, his income was much exaggerated. All she could say for him was that he'd got a good leg for a boot, and the best seat on a horse she'd ever seen. And yet, now they've given up horses and taken to motors, they seem as devoted as ever, which is absurd."

"Well, if they are happy——"

"I don't see how anybody can be happy with such a man. He is the soul of tactlessness; the sort of person who reminds you afterwards in cold blood of indiscreet confidences which you wish you hadn't told him, and who shouts your Christian name after you if you meet him in the street. He slapped my back once in a room full of strangers," said Augusta, swelling with ruffled dignity. "Imagine how I felt! Such things are *not done!* I always apologise to Cecil for having him here at all; he is so shockingly ill-bred."

"He has a very good heart," said Catherine, "and one gets used to his little ways."

"I do not see that a good heart is an excuse for slapping a lady on the back," said Augusta reprovingly. "I am sure you would not have liked it yourself."

Catherine owned that she would not have liked it, and the admission mollified Augusta.

"Luckily this rage for motoring keeps him out of Lady's Sarah's way," she said. "I suppose it is better she should be dull than annoyed, and she cannot endure the sight of him. It is the only point we have in common. Would you believe it, he asked her the other day how old she was! It was most unlucky Blanche should have proposed herself just now, as she practically did."

"Perhaps I had better go and find Lady Sarah now," said Catherine, growing tired of the recital of Augusta's grievances.

"Don't hurry away just when I want to talk to you," cried Augusta. "I particularly asked you to come early this morning. Grandmamma always comes down soon after twelve and takes a turn before luncheon. Surely it will be time enough for you to see her then."

Augusta was seated in a garden-tent, open on both sides, and looking on to a stretch of turf, which the gardeners were now busily engaged in mowing and rolling, winding their way in and out of the brilliant variegated beds.

Beyond the light palings which bounded the lawns on the one side, the deer were couched in the shade of the oaks, for the midday sun was very powerful. On the other side, close to the house, stretched the tennis courts, where Catherine

could see Philippa's light form running to and fro, and her bright hair blowing in the wind.

"Philippa takes no care of her complexion," said Augusta, following Catherine's gaze. "She left her hat here on the table in spite of all I could say. Girls are always like that. I wonder you let her play singles, Catherine; it is very hard work when a man plays so well as Colonel Moore, let him give her as many points as he will."

"I don't think he would let her overtire herself," said Catherine, anxiously. "He is very careful of her."

"He is quite a dear," said Augusta sentimentally. "That is exactly my idea of a man, you know. Rather domineering and very clever, with a delightful history of battles and things in the background. Really if I had met him instead of poor Cecil, there is no saying, but I suppose it was not to be. However, I have begged him to come over here whenever he likes; and he plays bridge, which is such a comfort, as Cecil won't and George Chilcott can't. So he is most useful in the evening, sings like a bird and quite a godsend. I am glad he is going to the War Office. He will be so handy for the opera. I am so fond of tame cats, and he is just the kind of tame cat I really like."

Here Lady Sarah was to be seen slowly moving across the lawn, leaning on her gold-headed cane, and followed by Tailer, carrying Mumbo Jumbo,

a basket of crochet, a little bag without which Lady Sarah never stirred, and two or three novels.

Augusta and Catherine hastened to meet this procession, and to assist Tailer in establishing their aged relative comfortably beneath the awning of the tent.

"Well, my love," said the old lady. "Here I am, you see, prepared to share the open-air cure for an hour or so before lunch. That will do, Tailer, you can put down all the things you have brought, and go back and fetch all the things you have forgotten. Where is Mumbo Jumbo's biscuit, pray?"

Lady Sarah was contriving to pass the time at Welwysbere agreeably enough, between bullying Tailer and squabbling with Augusta, and the latter's apprehensions of her visitor's dulness were quite unfounded.

"I will leave Catherine to entertain you, Grandmamma. I have a good deal to do and was only waiting till you came out," said Augusta.

"Never think about me, my love," said Lady Sarah indulgently. "Give me a book or a needle and I am always perfectly happy. Pray continue your usual morning occupations."

Augusta rustled away across the lawn, in her blue muslin and Leghorn hat, looking something like an overblown Dresden china shepherdess.

"My appearance is always the signal for Augusta's household duties to begin," said Lady

Sarah, very cheerfully, to Catherine. "Well, my love, have you decided to take my advice about Philippa?"

"I suppose I had better," said Catherine rather sadly. "David Moore said just the same."

"Oh, you asked *him*, did you. He is a fine fellow, your David Moore. We had the dullest of dinner parties last night, and your Colonel was pleased to sing to us. I enjoyed it vastly, for I heard every word of the *Leather Bottel* and all my old favourites. Mr. Bob Ralt thinks old English ballads vulgar. That sums the man up in a word, and Miss Clara Chilcott thought fit to agree with him. She also confided to me that she did not think it looked well for a man to play the piano."

"Clara is of the *nil admirari* order," said Catherine.

"That class of person usually is, my love. After all, it is only in proportion to their own cultivation that people can even feel, much less express, appreciation. However, I dare say Colonel Moore gets plenty of flattery, one way or the other; and no doubt he is a selfish creature, as any man must be who lives to five-and-thirty without getting married. So he is your cousin, my love! But very unlike your Chilcott relations."

"I only met him once—it was before my marriage. He came to Bridescombe. I remember

we went primrosing together. It was the first time I ever went primrosing in my life."

"One is apt to remember that sort of occasion," said Lady Sarah, busying herself with her crochet, but perfectly aware that the colour had deepened in Catherine's soft cheeks.

"I didn't mean—anything more than I said," said Catherine; her sincere and gentle regard met Lady Sarah's shrewd glance with perfect candour.

"My dear, you look five-and-twenty when you blush," said Lady Sarah, in a tone of compliment. "Not a day more. It is a most becoming habit. Though one I was never able to acquire," she added, regretfully. "Well, well. It will make poor Cecil happy to have Philippa in town. He needs cheering. I tottered round the gardens with him yesterday, and he was obliged to take me to the old parterre, as we used to call it. A fine mess Augusta has made of it. In my day herbaceous borders were kept in the kitchen garden. I never pretended to much horticultural knowledge, my love, but I hope I know a trifle more than Augusta. To hear her quoting seedsmen's catalogues to Grace Trumoin makes me positively ill. She is a Cockney from head to heel, and could not distinguish a turnip-top from a cabbage. Well, there is not a quiet green corner left in the old place but some hedgerow bramble or other with a new name must be popped into it. My

favourite copper beech cut down to let more light in on her roses, so that she can walk round and reel a string of names off a row of labels. And such names! In my young days when we wished to be thought botanists we quoted Latin as elegantly as possible. *Climbing Bessie Johnson* indeed! It may make Augusta think of a rose, but my imagination being stronger than my eyesight, it conveys nothing to me but the vision of a vulgar hoyden scrambling over a wall," said Lady Sarah resentfully.

"Talking of hoydens," said Catherine, smiling, "Philippa has finished her set, and is coming here for her hat."

Philippa came across the lawn, tall and handsome and serious, carrying her tennis racket, and followed by David, who looked leaner and browner than ever in his flannels.

Lady Sarah, sitting upright in her wicker chair, with her Mechlin head-dress, and white curls crowning her beautful old face, soft and cool, delicate as a wrinkled roseleaf, looked up sharply as Philippa stooped her bright head to kiss her grandmother.

"Well, my sweet Philippa, I suppose you are in the seventh heaven of delight."

"Why, he beat me," said Philippa, opening her blue eyes in wonder, "though he gave me points. I could beat Hector's head off if *he* gave me points, for I'm nearly even with him as it is."

"Pshaw. I was not thinking of your games."

"She doesn't know," interposed Catherine.

"Bless me, how indiscreet I am, but you can't grudge her poor old granny the pleasure of telling her," said Lady Sarah, mischievously hurrying out her news lest any one should forestall her, "that she's to go to London after all."

"Truly?" cried Philippa in breathless joy. "Do you mean by myself—with Cousin Augusta?"

Her mother's look answered her, half-fond, half-reproachfully.

"Was it granny who persuaded you, mother?" she cried.

"I understand we divide that responsibility, Colonel Moore," said Lady Sarah, glancing at the tall soldier who stood in the entrance of the tent, watching Philippa's ecstasy with an amused smile.

"What a fuss to make about a trip to town," thought David, "and what a dull life the poor girl must have led to be so excited over such a trifle."

"I'm quite willing to acknowledge my share of the responsibility, Lady Sarah," he said gaily.

CHAPTER VI

THE red cliffs, crowned with slopes and hillocks of daisied grass, stood out against blue sky and bluer sea. Below them the foaming waters surged round masses of soft crumbling shale, shining black and gold and green, with wet seaweed. In the calm distance a little fishing-boat sailed away towards the horizon. The cliffs sloped away into miles of sandy down, patched with golden gorse, here and there bearing rank, coarse, dry grasses to the very edge of the salt water.

On the shore, between the pointed rocks, tiny wild creatures of the deep sported in a fool's paradise of clear quiet pools, unmindful of the arid desolation that would presently overtake them with the ebbing of the tide.

"All this within reach of our doors, and we have never come here before. The very minute I grow up, I will have a motor of my own," cried Philippa. "What a splendid idea of Mr. Ralt's to have a picnic!"

She was leaning against the rocks, and the fresh sea-wind deepened her beautiful colour and bright-

ened her clear eyes, fluttering her blue serge skirt about her white feet, which were balancing on the side of one of the little pools and lapped by the miniature wavelets which blew across its surface.

On the top of the rock beside her a little figure was perched.

Lily Chilcott, held tightly by her uncle's strong arm.

"David is quite silly about children," said Miss Clara, who spoke habitually in the voice of a reproving schoolmistress. "Look at him down there among those nasty, shiny, slippery rocks. He will certainly let Lily get wet and ruin her frock. I think I will call her back."

"You may call till you are black in the face," said Mrs. Ralt, jovially, "but you will never get them to hear you. The wind is blowing inland."

"They might *see* me," said the persevering aunt; and she waved her large arms authoritatively, executing strange antics on the edge of the cliff.

"I wish she would fall over," growled Lord John *sotto voce* to Lady Grace, who had discovered a square yard of shade beneath a furze bush, and was politely sharing it with him.

"So do I," said Lady Grace, with unusual animation. "Does she ever leave any one alone?"

"Never, so far as I can see. She is a perpetual

joy to me. I shall feel quite lonely without her when I get back to town."

"Take her with you." suggested Lady Grace.

"One would never have a dull moment," he said, tipping his straw hat over his face. "Listen to her. She's off again."

"I really think, Catherine, that Philippa is rather old to take her shoes and stockings off and paddle," Miss Chilcott was saying, in a shocked voice.

"I hope she won't catch cold," was Catherine's only reply.

"It is not *that* I was thinking of," said Clara, unaware of Lord John's delighted chuckle. "It is all very well for quite little children; but I think even Lily is getting rather old,--and Philippa! Why she is nearly as tall as I am. There! I am certain that David saw me then." She redoubled her gesticulations. "How tiresome he is; he is turning Lily round and making them both look out to sea. That is just like David. I suppose he is afraid that we want him to make himself useful unpacking the lunch."

"There are plenty of us to do that, for we have only one basket with us, and I believe that is full of crockery," said Mr. Ralt. "However, lunch would be no use without liquor, and Augusta is bringing the wine-hampers and the rest of the things."

"She must surely be due. We have been here two hours," said a discontented voice.

"She is overdue. We calculated that by sending the carriage over night to Morecot, and catching the ten o'clock train from Ilverton this morning, she would be here only an hour later than we were," cried Mr. Ralt, who had planned the whole expedition, provided two motors to convey the majority of the party, and was now under the impression that they were all thoroughly enjoying themselves.

"I shall mutiny if this patch of shade gets any smaller. I see signs of its shrinking," growled Lord John. "Why should we get sunstroke to please Ralt?"

"I can't think why," said Lady Grace, calmly. "He is the kind of man who always contrives to do things with the maximum of discomfort."

"He has been asking me to go and stay with him in the North. He assures me they often take this sort of trip there," said Lord John, grimly. "I could hardly disguise my pleasure at the proposal."

"He has asked me, and I am going."

"Not really!"

"I would stay with my own washerwoman if she lived in the country and asked me—to save the expense of my flat. Every little helps," said Lady Grace, laconically. "You know how I loathe London."

"Every one does in theory, but in practice one can't keep away from it."

"I keep away from it nine months of the year, but I couldn't if I sorted out my invitations too carefully," said Lady Grace.

"Here is Thomas. Bless me! I hope there hasn't been an accident," said Miss Dulcinea, in alarmed tones.

But the servant was only charged with a message to say her ladyship thought the cliffs would be too hot, and would the party kindly join her in the shade of the rocks on the beach below, where lunch was being laid?

"The first sensible suggestion that has yet been made," said Lord John, rising with great alacrity.

"But this was so convenient for the motors. There is only a footway down the rocks," expostulated the disappointed Mr. Ralt.

"There is a road round, sir, which joins the one her ladyship took from Morecot."

"It must be a deuce of a way round—and a very bad road."

But the rest of the party unconcernedly left Mr. Ralt to settle the question of servants and motors as best he could.

"One expects to be either grilled, or frozen, or drenched to the skin at a picnic," said Lord John, assisting his neighbour to rise; "but why one should pretend to enjoy it, I don't know."

"Well, you needn't pretend to enjoy it with me," said Lady Grace.

Miss Dulcinea stumbled down the steep path-

way aided by Catherine and the stalwart Blanche; and Clara tripped behind, consoling herself with the reflection that she could now rescue Lily from the evil influence of her Uncle David.

They found Augusta enthroned, in the utmost coolness and comfort, upon the dry bed of sand and rocks in the deep shadow of the cliffs, issuing calm directions to flushed and heated footmen, who were spreading forth a banquet of cold quail and salmon and cutlets and a variety of chaud-froids, among crystal jugs of iced champagne and cider and claret cup, and bowls of salad and strawberries and frozen cream.

Lord John flew to her side, and congratulated her with the warmth of sincerity upon her talent for organisation, drawing a vivid picture of the discomfort from which she had rescued her guests.

"When I heard Bob talking last night of the fine camping ground on the top of the cliffs I made up my mind it would be a glaring exposed place, quite unfit for luncheon," said Augusta, with great composure. "But I said nothing, because he is always so noisy and tiresome, and brings forward time-tables and things, and argues until one is quite worn out; so I just say 'Yes' to everything he suggests, and don't do it."

"You are really marvellous," said Lord John, with cordial admiration.

"Of course, at the last moment Lady Sarah didn't come," continued Augusta, bestowing a

complacent smile upon Lord John. "How she could ever have contemplated it at her age, I don't know, but she did. So I came alone, as Cecil thought he ought to stay with her; he was glad of the excuse, for he hates picnics, like everybody else. George Chilcott followed in his dogcart, and we both felt quite sorry for you racing along in the dust. But Bob made Grace promise to go with him."

She glanced reproachfully at her bosom friend; but Lady Grace's eyes were turned away and she was looking thoughtfully out to sea, where the tall figures of David Moore and George Chilcott were outlined darkly against the dazzling glory of the waters, and between them a little light form—Lily—capering joyfully on the wet sands.

Philippa, left alone in a corner of the rocks, was hastily replacing her discarded shoes and stockings, and tying up her rebellious tresses; she had just become aware of the advent of Augusta and the luncheon. Presently she came swiftly across the sands, and took the coveted place beside her idol.

"Oh, Cousin Augusta! How beautifully cool and fresh you look! We have had such a heavenly time. But I'm afraid I'm rather untidy," said Philippa, with a hasty endeavour to smooth her splashed and sandy skirt. "But do what I would I could never look like you, so what does it matter?"

"Philippa! What a state you are in," exclaimed Clara, as Miss Dulcinea was deposited, panting, at the foot of the cliff, by the tired Catherine and the vigorous Mrs. Ralt. Really, a girl of your age should know better than to get herself into such a mess."

"You should see Lily," said Philippa, mischievously. "She's simply drenched. No, no, I don't mean really," in alarm. "Cousin David took off her frock and spread it in the sun to dry. It's only a little sea-water."

"Took off her frock!" gasped Clara. "Do you mean she is now paddling—*in her petticoat?*"

"To be sure, she is; but Cousin George doesn't mind."

"Do leave them alone, Clara," said Catherine's gentle voice, but to no purpose.

The exhausted but heroic aunt was already almost out of hearing, climbing over slippery rocks and toiling through heavy sand to reach the delinquent.

"Here comes Clara. Now we shall catch it," said honest George, apprehensively.

"My frock! My frock!" giggled little Lily, but her frail fingers grasped her uncle's solid brown hand convulsively.

"Come on," said David. "We'll race her."

He picked up the frock, huddled it on to his small niece as best he could, swung her on to his shoulder, and made for the luncheon-

party, who watched the chase and its result sympathetically.

"Give her to me," said Lady Grace, "and put her between us. Now you're safe, Lily, I'll button your frock, and Uncle David will give you some chicken."

The child looked up curiously into the calm high-bred face.

"It's rather wet underneath," she said, confidentially; "but Aunt Clara won't never know if you don't tell."

"You wicked little creature," said Lady Grace, and, moved by the appealing expression of the great black eyes and pale elfin face, she suddenly stooped and kissed Lily.

"It can't hurt her, can it? It's only sea-water," she said, looking round appealingly.

"Nothing could hurt anybody in this heat," said Augusta, decidedly.

Clara presently took her place at the feast in a subdued condition, very unlike the mood of virtuous indignation which had previously possessed her.

George, who was annoyed with himself for being afraid of his sister's reproaches, had given vent to his annoyance with unusual vigour.

"I tell you what, Clara, if you hunt that poor little beggar away from David every time they're enjoying themselves together, I'll let him take her away with him altogether as he wishes,

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and see if he can't make her happier than we do."

He had not meant to tell Clara of David's proposition, any more than he meant to comply with it; but he used the threat that came uppermost.

"Let David take her away!" repeated Clara, stunned.

"Well, see to it that you leave them alone, then," thundered George, and he turned on his heel and tramped heavily over the sand beside his cowed and astonished relative, in time to see Lady Grace stoop protectingly over Lily's little dark head.

His face softened; but towards his sister there was no relenting, so that Miss Chilcott, to the surprise of the culprit, made no comment upon the audacity of Lily's behaviour, but ate her luncheon in stony silence.

As soon as the feast was over—and it was certainly prolonged almost unduly—Augusta's one object was to rest herself thoroughly until it should be time for tea. Her ideal of a pleasant afternoon corresponded so closely with that of Lord John, that they were presently to be perceived dozing gently in adjacent corners, chosen with a view to shelter from wind and sun.

The indefatigable Mr. Ralt managed to hire a boat, and, having invited every one else in turn to go with him in vain, was at length obliged

to content himself with Clara's company, and departed with chastened enthusiasm.

"Has he gone? How very restful!" murmured Augusta, opening one eye, and closing it again.

Philippa perceived that her divinity was in no mood for conversation, so she put her dignity in her pocket, and assisted Lily and her uncle to make castles in the sand.

Miss Dulcinea looked on in delight from her distant perch among the rocks, with Catherine by her side.

"After all, Philippa is only a child at heart," she said. "She is quite as happy as Lily. Look at her."

Catherine looked, and shook her head.

"She will not come back from London a child."

The triumph faded from poor Miss Dulcinea's simple face, and Catherine repented.

"Never mind, Auntie. It is natural. As they say, I cannot keep her for ever, and she looks so bright and happy now—so different from the look she sometimes wears at home—that it is clear the poor child needs a little pleasure and novelty and companionship. I have shut her up too much. Perhaps the life at Shepherd's Rest is really too quiet for a young thing."

"Perhaps it is, my darling," said old Miss Dulcinea. "I have often thought how young *you* were when you settled down there, and wondered whether it were quite right—or whole-

some—that you should have hidden yourself away from the world so much—all these years?"

Catherine felt a little pang at her heart. She had asked herself this question not a few times lately.

The faint misgivings which had assailed her during the past months of Philippa's ever-increasing unrest and discontent had resolved themselves into a very distinct and depressing doubt since David Moore's return.

Had she been morbid and cowardly—devoting her thoughts and consecrating her existence rather to the dead than to the living? She questioned her own motives and conduct sadly enough. Was it too late to start afresh—to reconstruct her life—to begin again?

Not for George, it seemed, because he was a man, and must live a man's life and do a man's work. Not for David—whose future held a thousand possibilities; whose career, in a manner, was but just begun. But for her—though she was, as she somewhat wistfully reflected, in actual years younger than either of these two—oh, surely, for her it was too late. What could be left for her but to go quietly on to the end in the little round of duties she had created for herself? She had put in order and beautified a corner, though but an infinitesimal corner, of the universe, and was attached to it by a thousand threads of habit, responsibility, and association. She was

the humble Providence of a few humble lives. Had she indeed been useless in her generation? Her heart—her consciousness of pure intention—cried out no; but her judgment faltered and hesitated.

Turning in her perplexity to look at Miss Dulcinea, the question lost itself in a smile, for the soft wrinkled eyelids had closed over the tender faded blue eyes, and her aunt was slumbering peacefully, nodding forward as she sat.

No problems long disturbed Miss Dulcinea's serene mind, calm with the repose of settled convictions.

Catherine rose noiselessly and moved away, climbing cautiously over the rocks until she reached the firm stretch of sand beyond.

The tide was now out so far that the sea looked a great way off.

She wandered down to the edge of the glittering water, and stood shading her brow with her hand, looking across it into the mist of distance, until her eyes were dazzled. Then she walked quietly along the strip of wet sand next the sea.

The sea always reminded her of her long childhood at Calais; and the girl she had been then was much more real in Catherine's consciousness than the woman she was now; for she was of those whose hearts remain young, and she was often aware of a half-amused, half-shamed sensation of alarm lest it might be some day discovered

—in spite of her middle-aged face and figure—that she had never really grown up at all.

As in a vision she saw the girl she had once been—a maiden with fresh complexion, short curly hair, and bright eyes, shockingly dressed in a faded red velvet cap and a brown ulster turned green with age—hurrying up and down the deserted sands at Calais, in the chill March wind, crying her heart out because she was in love and desolate, without hope, without friends. Poor little thing! Catherine looked back upon her with some pity and more awe. She had been so very young, so very innocent, so very certain that the happiness of her whole life was bound up in that pure and childish passion for the man she had seen but once, and knew not at all. So ready—wilfully, woefully ready—to sacrifice anything—to lay down her life for a dream—a fancy. Poor little Catherine! And after all the wildest of her hopes had come to pass; she had married the hero. . . .

Now it was no longer the girl Catherine Carey—the little nobody from Calais—who was walking by the edge of the sea, but Catherine Adelstane, a woman alone, in a grave grey gown that somehow typified her quiet existence. A woman not given to weeping, nor to wild and frensied wishes; but possessed of a nature tranquillised and contented by the passing of peaceful years. A woman who was even—the colour rose in Catherine's

soft face, as though she were half-ashamed of the fact she could not deny—lighthearted, were it not for the one geat anxiety that beset her.

A woman who only asked—it is the pathetic prayer of middle-age—to be allowed to work in peace a little while longer for the happiness of others. This was what she had become. A resigned and gentle Catherine, but yet a Catherine from whose wistful eyes the laugh was never very far distant after all.

When Lord John Trelleck learnt that the pair of grey horses would take nearly three hours to make the journey home to Welwysbere, he elected to return thither by Mr. Ralt's motor, which would cover the distance in about forty minutes; and since Lady Grace accepted George Chilcott's invitation to be driven home in his dogcart with little Lily, Augusta invited Catherine to occupy the vacant seat in the barouche.

For the first few miles of their journey the road skirted the sea, and the great rolling hillocks of sands, with the yellow gorse blazing in the low sunshine; then they left the sea behind, and the wind-tossed pines and open downs of coarse grass changed to the familiar stunted oak and Devon hedgerow; the soil grew rich and red; the long shadows fell from the elms across the fine green turf of the well-stocked meadows; the brown roofs and white walls of prosperous homesteads

rose amid armies of thatched ricks and stacks and leafy orchards. They drove over miles of shaded highways, and through sunken lanes, in the cool and pleasant twilight of the long June day.

"I have wanted to talk to you for ages, Catherine," said Augusta, vaguely, "but you know how we are always interrupted. It is very good of you to let Philippa come with us to town. Cecil is delighted to have her, and so am I. You know we are quite as fond of her as if she had been our own."

"You are very kind to her," said Catherine.

"And you are sure you like her to come?" Augusta asked.

"I can't quite say that, Augusta. I have never parted with her before, and she is all I have in the world; but she wishes to go, and—and you will take care of her?" Catherine's voice grew appealing.

"Of course I will take care of her," said Augusta, with dignity, "and it's all very well for you to talk of her being all you have in the world, but look at me, with neither chick nor child. I shouldn't talk of being lonely if I had a pretty daughter, I can tell you, though naturally in my position I would rather have a son. Of course you will say I have Cecil." Augusta had a habit which exasperated Catherine of attributing unlikely remarks to her, and then pointing out

their futility. "But, after all, what is a man? Devoted as we have always been, I have never even pretended that Cecil understood me. I don't think you ought to grudge Philippa to me for a few weeks, Catherine, I don't indeed."

"Perhaps not," said Catherine.

"And when you own yourself she wishes it so much. I can't help being touched at her fondness for me," said Augusta. "It is quite pathetic the way she follows me about! I don't know what she sees in me, I'm sure."

Catherine was sorely tempted to reply that she did not know either, but she refrained, and merely observed:

"She is at the age when girls take violent fancies to people. She has certainly taken a violent fancy to you."

"Well, I can tell you it is very much to her advantage if she has," said Augusta, pompously. "Though I should have looked upon her, in any case, being Cecil's heiress, as she is, like a child of my own. But I naturally take more interest in a girl who really, I may say, almost *worships* me," said Augusta, with modest triumph, "than I should to another. And you know, Catherine, as I have told you before, I mean to leave my money to Philippa if she *does* inherit the Abbey."

"It is very kind of you to say so, Augusta, but please do not talk of such things. Philippa

will have plenty, more than is good for her, I am afraid."

"Indeed, she won't; the Abbey is a frightfully expensive place to keep up. I am always urging Cecil to let it; but you know how obstinate he is. If she is to live there as he wishes, she will need far more money than he can leave her. And I quite disagree with Blanche, who is all for hunting out poor relations of papa's whom we have never even heard of, to inherit her money, and wants me to do the same."

"It would surely be just."

"Not at all. Why should it be just? Poor dear papa made his own money, and his family had nothing to do with it. I told Blanche that I meant to make a new will directly I went back to town and leave everything to Philippa, and she was as much annoyed as if she expected to outlive me and inherit my money herself. People are such dogs in the manger. As I told her, it is far more likely to be the other way about, racing about in motors all over Europe as she does. Every day I expect to hear she has been killed, or at least maimed for life," said Augusta, with perfect calm.

"I hope you will not tell Philippa of your intentions: a thousand things might happen to make you change your mind. Though I am none the less grateful to you for the kind thought."

"I haven't exactly told her," said Augusta,

rather guiltily. "I may have let slip that she will get my pearls one of these days; perhaps I shall give her some when she marries. And that reminds me, Catherine, that you need not be afraid I shall let her meet the wrong kind of man."

"I hope you will not let her meet any men at all," cried Catherine, " she is only a child. And you promised you would not let her be considered as *come out* in any way."

"Of course not," said Augusta. "Still, if she sees *any one*, it is important, even at sixteen, that they should be the right people. I am not like Blanche, who cares nothing at all who people are, so long as she likes them. I say what does it matter if one likes them or not so long as they are all right? I shall get up boy and girl parties for Philippa, and I have thought of three boys who would be excellent matches for her, if they *should* happen—one never can tell, you know—and she is very pretty."

"Dear Augusta, pray do not put such things into her head or into mine, or you will frighten me out of letting her go after all," cried Catherine in distress. "It will be quite excitement enough for Philippa to be taken to the Opera, or a theatre or two, and to drive in the Park with you. The rest of her time she will be quite happy with Roper, since you are so kind as to let me send Roper with her."

"But I hope you will trust me to get her clothes," said Augusta. "Roper must be quite out of date.

I can assure you," earnestly, "I will take as much pains to dress her as I do myself."

Catherine's attention wandered during the long monologue on dress which ensued. She realised with a sudden pang that she was actually giving up the care of her child for the moment to Augusta, and felt much inclined to put a sudden end to poor Lady Adelstane's babble by informing her that she had changed her mind, and did not intend to let Philippa go after all. What, after all, was the advice of Lady Sarah or of David Moore to her, that she must needs follow it? Ah, if it were only Lady Sarah and David Moore whom she had to consider, how quickly would her decision have been taken!

But there was Philippa.

Philippa, who was no longer a child, but a most relentless youthful judge: a merciless detector of weakness and vacillation, and full of a grievance which was not, alas! quite an unreasonable grievance; of discontent and impatience with her surroundings, and the isolation which Catherine had found so restful and pleasant.

Perhaps it was the secret guilty conviction that her child had some reason on her side, no less than a lack of moral courage to disappoint her, that kept Catherine silent; whilst Augusta, quite unaware that she was monopolising the conversation, chattered happily on concerning her plans for Philippa's entertainment until the drive came to an end.

CHAPTER VII

DAVID MOORE, returning home to England at the very moment of the year when the beauty of his native country was at its height, could not but pay it the tribute of a regretful sigh now and then when he reflected upon the long years of his exile.

The weather during his stay at Bridescombe happened to be the perfection of early June weather. Every morning he woke to find the Devonshire valley bathed in haze of early morning sunshine, and the lawn under his window glittering with dew, beneath old elm-trees thickly clothed with green, and mighty oaks with scanty foliage yet freshly golden.

A splendid variety of English timber in near perfection and distant outline studded the grounds of Bridescombe and crowned the slopes of the Welwysbere hills. An opening in the shrubberies showed stretches of yellow meadow rich with the fulfilment of the season's growth. Closer at hand a gravel path wound through well-kept shrubs to the borders of a little lake, thickly fringed with lily leaves, and reflecting in its black depths

the crimson of a copper beech and the trembling foliage of a tall sentinel poplar.

Bridescombe, if less stately than Welwysbere Abbey, was yet the very ideal of a pleasant country house without, though within the arrangements left much to be desired.

David decided that George Chilcott was in some respects to be envied, and thought of himself, sadly, as a lonely man without home or family; he was acutely reminiscent, in this country quiet, of his years of exile, thinking of opportunities missed, of good work unrecognised, of risks run and hardships faced to no purpose, of gallant lives laid down in vain. Every soldier who has had a fair share of campaigning must be subject to such melancholy retrospective moods, unless indeed he has been exceptionally lucky, or is exceptionally selfish. David was neither the one nor the other. He had striven hard and accomplished brilliant work during his own varied career; he had made some mistakes and accepted much suffering in the matter-of-fact way peculiar to the Anglo-Saxon race; but his exceptional ability, aided by an attractive and sympathetic personality, had obtained a fair share of recognition and reward.

Squire George looked at his brother-in-law and sighed in his turn. Here was David, his junior, a distinguished soldier, a lieutenant-colonel and a V.C., resigning the command of his regiment

in the Orange River Colony only to accept an appointment on the General Staff at the War Office. George, too, had loved soldiering, but he had sent in his papers on obtaining his company, and settled down, as he put it dismally to himself, to a fat farmer's life, on an estate too small to afford him full occupation—a life which appeared to be one of ease and comfort, though it was in reality filled with petty cares and irritating domestic worry.

He looked back to the years of his brief married life with heavy regret for the peace and happiness that had filled them. Delia's nature had been bright and joyous and her interests many and varied. The minor troubles of life had been dispersed by her glad energy, and lightened by her caresses and consolation. Now they loomed largely upon him, aggravated by constant complaints from his mother and sister, who spared no opportunity of fault-finding and who would have been more caustic still, save that they were a little afraid of George, and believed it their duty to humour him to a certain extent. Thus, when Clara had unwittingly goaded him to extremity, she would endure the angry retort she had elicited with Christian resignation and remark to her mother, "We must remember that poor George is a widower," or "I dare say he was thinking of poor Delia," with tender forbearance; which was real and not assumed, for Clara was a

conscientious and well-meaning person, who lived but to fulfil the behests of her elderly but strong-minded parent.

His boy's infancy had been only a time of delight to poor George, who heard much of the manifold perfections of his offspring from its adoring mother, and believed in most of them; but it appeared to him now that his little girl's childhood was only a record of squabbles and punishments. Little Lily's delinquencies were reported to him as though they had been crimes, and he was led to believe her an unusually naughty child, though she never showed this side of her character to him—an abstention which, according to her aunt and grandmother, clearly proved the exceeding artfulness of her disposition.

She looked at George, with her mother's great black eyes shining, full of silent meaning, from her small pale face; for though she lived in the country and out of doors, and drank new warm milk from the cow, and was fed upon porridge, little Lily remained unaccountably thin, and wizened, and sallow, the exact opposite of her well-grown, healthy, rosy brother, who was six years her senior. She was remarkably precocious —another grievance to her relatives, who were obliged to lock up books and newspapers lest she should imbibe their contents unobserved.

"She is not to be trusted," said Clara Chilcott.

"She is Delia over again," said old Mrs. Chil-

cott; and it is to be feared that in these words she summed up Lily's failure to gain her relatives' approbation. They did not mean to be unkind, but merely strove in vain to change her nature into one more nearly resembling their own.

Old Mrs. Chilcott was absolute in her sway over her son's household, and George seldom interfered with her, partly because he had a natural respect for his mother's experience and authority, and partly because he desired above all things to keep the peace.

Lily was the small human sacrifice unwittingly offered up to gain this end, and after all the end was not gained. For the victories obtained in the unequal battle were not complete until they had been retailed to the father of the rebel, who was exhorted that it was his duty to denounce and not to pity the wretched little offender.

"I believe the poor little kid is a regular spitfire. Nobody can do anything with her. She's had these daily rows over her lessons ever since she was four years old," said George, in weary, dejected tones to David; thus apologising for the low sobbing and the steady rumble of sermonising that issued from the dining-room, where daily after breakfast was Clara secluded for two miserable hours with her reluctant pupil.

David listened and grew wrathful.

"Why don't you teach her yourself?"

"I—good Lord! It's not in my line," said George, staring.

"It's not in Clara's line either," said David, shortly.

"My mother tried for some time, and said it made her quite ill. I suppose Lily must do lessons with some one," said George, helplessly.

David was silent, but his silence was fraught with meaning.

The next day he caught Lily and held her, as she dashed past him in the hall with red eyes, carrying her slate.

"Let me go, Uncle David!"

"I won't—I want you, Lily."

"Let her go, please, David," said Clara's authoritative voice. "She is being sent to her room."

"Is she? What for?" said David. His glance at his cousin Clara was more fiery than he knew, and Clara quailed.

"Put me down, Uncle David. I'm not a baby, and I don't want to be carried," gasped the culprit, between sobs and fright.

"As your uncle seems to think you may be punished unjustly, Lily," said Clara, swelling with offended dignity, "you can show him your slate, and tell him what you have done."

Lily hesitated, then a gleam of alarmed amusement stole into her long-lashed eyes, still wet with tears. She stood on one leg, turned her

right foot round her left ankle, and held out the slate.

"What is this?"

"Aunt Clara wrote "*Lily has not been good to-day*" on my slate, and told me to take it to Granny; and—and I rubbed out the *not*."

"It was the *deceit* I thought most of," said Clara, impressively. "As she was going away, pretending obedience, a sudden thought struck me, for I happened to see her wet finger, and I insisted on looking at the slate. She was hoping her grandmamma would praise her for being good on false pretences."

"I wasn't," said Lily, "and grandmamma never praises me."

"What did you do it for?"

Lily hung her head.

"For fun."

"You said you were sorry, and now you are smiling, Lily. I don't believe you know the meaning of repentance."

"I do," sobbed Lily.

"What is it then?" said the inexorable aunt.

"Being sorry you've done something pleasant, but not till after you've done it," said the culprit.

Colonel Moore was a disciplinarian, and had no idea of calling its elder's authority in question in the presence of a child. He said in a very gentle tone:

"You should not have done it, Lily," and kissed her.

"If you are going to pet her whenever she is naughty, David," said Clara, as Lily ran upstairs, "I shall have to give up teaching her altogether."

"I think it would be the best plan," said David, and he walked away without looking at her.

Clara complained bitterly to her brother and received scant sympathy.

"Why should you make the poor little beggar her own executioner?" he growled. "You know what a row she'd have got into when my mother read your message. Small blame to her if she tried to outwit you. I don't believe you understand her a bit, Clara."

"It's you who are taken in. I am sorry to say it of her, George, but Lily is one of those artful little girls who know how to get round gentlemen."

"All the better for her," said George, crossly.

Clara was about to retort, but she remembered in time that George was a widower, and left the room with an expression of angelic patience.

The threatened storm burst the day after the seaside picnic, when Clara entered the study, where her brother and David were placidly smoking, with the ominous words:

"George, mamma says—oh, I beg your pardon, David, I did not see you were there. If you please, George, I should like to speak to you."

"What's the matter?" said the unfortunate

squire, scenting more domestic embroilments. "Go on, Clara, don't make mysteries."

"I am far from wishing to make mysteries, George. In fact, perhaps, as it is to do with Lily, it is as well that David should hear the worst."

David looked up quickly, but George, being more accustomed to his sister's portentous methods of dealing with trifles, smoked on without moving.

"Lily's diary has been found, George."

"I didn't know it was lost."

"It was not lost. Lily had hidden it. I asked her for it this morning, and she pretended she could not find it, so mamma had the day-nursery turned out thoroughly, and it was found carefully tucked away at the very bottom of her play-box."

"Well?"

"Mamma says that she could not have believed it possible, unless she had read it with her own eyes, that a girl of ten years old could have written such things."

"What did she want to read it for?"

"She read it as a duty. And a most unpleasant duty it turned out to be."

"Have you read it, too?"

"I have glanced at it. I have not yet had time to read it all," said the conscientious Clara. "I am bound to tell you, George, that what I did read shocked me excessively. Mamma says

that in justice to her and to me she thinks you ought to look at it yourself, if only to give you a clearer insight into Lily's character."

"I am not in the habit of reading other people's private diaries."

"It is absurd to call Lily a person; she is only a child."

"Where is she?"

"In mamma's room. Mamma has been reading bits of the journal to her that she may hear how shocking they sound out loud."

"Go and fetch Lily here, and the journal with her," said George, autocratically.

"I can't do that, George. She wished you to come upstairs. You must please yourself, of course. I can only tell her I have delivered her message."

Miss Chilcott left the room, and George turned to David with a groan.

"These everlasting scenes——"

"Put a stop to them."

"How can I?"

"Any way you choose. She's your child. Send her to school if you won't give her to me."

"David, it goes against the grain to send Delia's little girl away from home."

"It would go more against the grain with me to see her bullied from morning till night."

"I'll go upstairs and get the journal and throw the damned thing into the fire, and there'll be

an end of it," said George, with the sudden energy of a weak man.

"Don't do that," said David slowly. "I shouldn't wonder if they were right, and reading it might make you understand her better. Look here, George, let me go and get Lily and the diary together, and bring them down here. She'll give me leave to read it fast enough."

"My mother won't let you have either one or the other."

David gave him a look. "Won't she?" he said, and left the room immediately.

Old Mrs. Chilcott, in her black gown and white cap, sat in the bay window of her pleasant morning-room, crocheting a shawl; her thin fingers flew in and out of the scarlet wool, her eyes were bent on her work, and her lips were firmly compressed.

In the middle of the apartment was a music-stool, and on the music-stool was perched Lily, very round-shouldered and heaving with sobs, as she read aloud from a small manuscript book. David perceived that it was the obnoxious journal, and took it gently from his niece's unresisting hands before he spoke.

"Aunt Lydia, George is very much put out about this affair," he said. "I am going to take Lily down to him."

"I sent a message to tell George to come to *me*," said Mrs. Chilcott.

"And I delivered the message," said Clara, in sepulchral tones.

"Don't be a fool, Clara," said her mother sharply. "Of course you delivered it. Give *me* the diary, David, I prefer to show it to my son myself."

David put the diary in his pocket.

"I'm sorry, Aunt Lydia, but you may take it I am carrying out George's own wishes. With your permission Lily had better come with me now."

Mrs. Chilcott glared at her nephew and David returned the look steadily.

She knew that opposition was useless, and said no more; the sharp click of her needles never ceased for a moment.

Colonel Moore led Lily downstairs, and, entering the study, closed the door.

She stood on one leg in her favourite attitude, with a miserable frightened little face, and twisted her small fingers nervously together.

Her father could not bear to look at her, so he stared at the carpet, with a very undecided expression of countenance, and pulled at his heavy yellow moustache.

Lily stole a glance at her uncle, who had returned to his arm-chair, and something in his look made the child spring across the room to him, with a great sob, and hide her face upon the breast of his rough tweed coat.

David let her have her cry out, until he felt the long-drawn sobs dying away; then he lifted a very pale and woebegone little face from his shoulder, and, discarding the small and grimy handkerchief she was clutching in one doll-like hand, he dried her eyes very carefully with his own large white one.

"Lily, will you let daddy and me read the poor little journal?" he whispered, holding his frail burden closely to him, and brushing the elfin face with his moustache.

In her relief and gratitude for his gentleness and sympathy Lily was only too ready to say yes. She consented eagerly, caring little what her uncle and father might do, so that they were not visibly displeased with her. For her quick observation had shown her that George Chilcott, though depressed, did not look angry.

She glanced timidly from one to the other of the arbitrators of her fate, unaware that these two big men's hearts were melting with love and pity, for the dead woman's sake, whose legacy she was to both.

The library was a very large room, and at the further end stood an immense sofa, furnished with soft square cushions. David picked her up, carried her across and deposited her among them.

"Curl up here and go to sleep," he said. "You will be worn out after so many tears."

She laid her little pale cheek obediently on the cushion, and closed her eyes. When she opened them again she saw her father and uncle pacing up and down the verandah outside, but she could not hear what they said, and presently, as David had expected, she fell asleep from sheer exhaustion, too much spent with weeping to be able to conjecture what they would do with her or her diary.

The journal had been kept at irregular intervals for about three months. It was an unlucky purchase of Lily's own, commented upon approvingly at the time by her relatives, who had taken her to shop in Ilverton. Apparently Lily's notions of diary-keeping and autobiography were somewhat confused. She began by obligingly recounting her origin, obviously basing her style upon the opening chapter of *Gulliver's Travels* —a book generally considered improving for children, though it is hard to know why.

"My father has a large estate in Devonshire. I am his only daughter, but he has a son somewhat older than me. The charge of maintaining me being somewhat great for a narrow fortune, my Aunt and Grandmother reside with us and assist my father in maintaining me and applying me close to my studies.

"Unlike most children and especially my Cousin

Philippa, who I must add is also somewhat my senior by 6 years and my intimut friend, I spend my lesure moments reading the best authors all I can get, viz. Miss Yonge, Walter Scott, Anderson's fairy tales, the Bab ballads, the Wide Wide World, Shakespeare's Lamb's tales and many other standard works."

The stilted style proving too great an effort, it was more or less abandoned after two or three pages, laboriously inscribed in Lily's best round hand. The writing degenerated into a hurried but legible scrawl—Lily's thoughts obviously transcribed without an effort.

"My Father has a reddish face and a goldish moustache. I may be predijiced in his favour, but I think him nice-looking, though his nose is rather round at the tip. Hector is a plain likeness of his patternal parent, but it is to be hopped may improve. Boys are very fortunate as their moustache will some day hide the worst end of their face, this we cannot hope for but are luckily generally better looking than them. Aunt Clara is an exception, her eyes are like glass marbles in a pudding. Granny has black eyes and her face is thoroly mapped out in wrinkles, but she is hansome, for an old person I mean, only her neck is rather baggy. She has a dreadful temper and all the servants hate her except Cook, but

Cook says she knows better than to let her see it, so I suppose Cook is the one person *she* is afraid of. Every one else is afraid of her espechully my poor father, but when I grow up I mean to take him quietly away somewhere with me and my husband, and let him have a happy old age under my roof where Granny shall never set foot. Jane and Eliza have promised to come and live with me, and in return I have promised to invite their young men to tea instead of their having to hide in the shrubbery on Sunday evenings. . . . My head is very bad to-day. Aunt Clara came to see me in bed last night. She told me Uncle David was coming. He is poor Mamma's brother, but he is Granny's nephew too because Mamma and Daddy were first cousins. When Aunt Clara told me I could not remember the last time he came, the devel tempted me to say I did. It turns out I wasn't born. Every one is libel to make mistakes. I am to learn a new hymn to punish me. She has acidentilly given me one I know already but I did not tell her. I am writing my diary while I am supposed to be learning it. I hate Aunt Clara. . . . This morning the devel wat at it again tempting me to take three almonds off the sideboard but I only took one. Unfortunately I pulled it out of my pocket with my handkerchief at lessons. Whatever I do I am always found out. Hector says some boys are like that, he isn't. I would not have taken it

only in revenge because 2 days running I have had no dessert for bad behaviour, I was sent to bed, one never knows what a day may bring 4th. I wish Aunt Clara would not come and see me in bed. Cook says it is very bad for me to cry every night. . . . Yesterday Daddy took me to Church and I was very good indeed. I mean in my inside, I felt good, espechully when the organ played and we sang Abide with me. Aunt Clara had a cold and could not come. Wishing to please God I tried to be sorry, but I wasn't really. She sings very loud and out of tune, and pokes me if I get in a reveree. . . . Aunt Clara caught me in the pantry. I was laughing at Macpherson's jokes. He is a very witty man. He likes to have a crack with me. This is Scotch. She rowed me about it in bed for hours and hours and I cried so my head is dreadful this morning. Granny says children don't know what headaches mean. I smiled to myself. When no one is looking I can be as sarkastic as Granny. . . . I had a nice long think last night. I have several private thinks, which make me happy when I am all alone. One is about a game Philippa and I used to have. We played I was found out to be Cousin Catherine's child and she was found out to be me. She told me all the things she would say to Granny and Aunt Clara (she is as brave as a lion) and how Cousin Catherine would pet me, and let me sleep in her room, and not eat fat or milk

puddings, and read all the books at Shepherd's Rest. Philippa is too old for games now but she has promised to tell me all her secrets so I don't mind. I feel rather old for games myself. . . . Uncle David has been to see Hector and Hector has written to tell me he is splendid, he tipped Hector £2. I hope he will tip me, but people never seem to think of girls wanting money. When I am grown up I shall frequently tip girls and not advise them how to spend it. He tipped Hector's three chums, Browne and Noble and Skinner £1 each. All the boys knew who he was and cheered him like anything, and Hector said he was proud of him. Aunt Clara would read the letter though I said it was private. She made me learn 'Pride, ugly pride.' . . . When they were at dinner I fetched the book of Plato that I mustn't read, from poor Mamma's bookcase, and read about the death of Socrates which always makes me sad but agreeable. There is a dry flower on the page so I know poor Mamma must have liked it too. He does not appear to have said many prayers. He just screwed hisself up and died. It is what we must all come to. Determined to be a philosopher. . . . Last night my think was about winning a V.C. for myself. The house was on fire and I saved every one by my presence of mind. As it hapened the King and Queen was there, so my gallantry was rewarded. Aunt Clara had to stand by and see it done, which is the

part of this think I like best. . . . Uncle David is come; he is like Edgar Ravenswood but not so melancholy. Granny does not like him though he is her nephew. He does not like Granny and Aunt Clara but he is very polite. Daddy would be happy if he could now Uncle David is here. I always know when he tries to make jokes to make things go off well. I think this is pathetick, as he is not really a witty man like Macpherson. . . . Uncle David has not tipped me but I don't mind as he pets me all the time. I am very happy indeed. . . We went to the sea and paddled. Uncle David took me on his shoulder. Though I am far too old for this I enjoyed it. A person named Lady Grace petted me. I ate two meringues and felt rather sick. The ends of Uncle David's moustache are curled, he does this with soap. He has a servant to wash and dress him. When I grow up I shall marry Uncle David if it is not illiggle. . . . Aunt Clara says she has been obliged to tell Uncle David how naughty I am. I wish I was dead. . . . Aunt Clara has asked to see my diary, and there's no fire so I can't burn it. I shall pretend I have lost it, and hide it in my playbox. . . . I have written a letter to poor Mamma and buried it in my own garden as deep as I could. Perhaps God will let her read it, and in it I have asked her to come and fetch me. I don't know what else to do. . . ."

The two men looked at each other in silence across this revelation of a child's mind.

"And I thought she was only a baby," said George, with a groan.

CHAPTER VIII

PHILIPPA was gone, and Catherine sat alone in her little garden at Shepherd's Rest, mechanically gazing down the narrow path before her cottage; upon the rim of turf freshly studded with defiant daisies since yesterday's mowing; upon the edging of pinks, green buds bursting into white bloom in a forest of grey-blue leaf and stem; upon the long line of quivering emerald blades which heralded the arrival of the brilliant gladioli; and the row of standard roses above them.

Her view of the garden path was bounded by the cherry-tree she had planted on Philippa's fourth birthday, and by a flowering tree-lupin, a great snow queen showering white blossom above a group of giant oriental poppies, scarlet and black.

In the midst of the beauty she loved, and the garden she had created, the words, *Behold, your house is left unto you desolate*, rang in her ears.

What was the meaning of this dear low red roof, those broad eaves where the house-martins were darting in and out of humbler homes in the shelter of hers, of the brown porch curtained with

clematis, the warm cob walls, gay and sweet with roses and honeysuckle, if they did not mean home to Philippa?

Catherine asked herself this question, almost startled by the pang of grief and indignation which assailed her at the thought that her child held cheap this rose-clad corner of the west.

In the course of years, the home, valued at first only because it sheltered the one she loved best in all the world, had become dear for its own sake to Catherine. Had she treasured the casket and lost the jewel it contained?

Her beloved child was sometimes uncertain, capricious, exacting; often unresponsive; but certain was the consolation afforded by that humble cottage, and garden, and farm; certain the dreamy joy of the sunset over the hills, the outline of the solemn pines, the blue haze of distance, the white foam of orchard blossom against a turquoise sky, the sunny garden with its shady corners of fig-tree and fernery, the silent wood, the brook bubbling eternally in the meadow, the cool restfulness of the oak parlour with its deep window-seat and shelves of chosen books, its memories of the warmth and brightness of wood-fire and lamp on winter evenings, of sunblinds and rosebowls in summer days.

For sixteen years the world had passed this corner by, and Catherine had hugged her happiness, forgetful of trouble, believing all her

responsibilities bounded by the thatched walls of her garden, and shut in by the high red banks of the Devon hedgerows that enclosed the little farm.

Within these sheltered precincts how faithful she had been to her duties; how she had fought against the idleness and dreaming congenial to her nature; how conscientious, how passionately tender had been her guardianship of her child.

Perhaps poor mortals would seldom fail in duty were duty always cut and dried and certain. It may be the added difficulty of discovering where duty lies that begets hesitation and doubt, and consequent half-heartedness in performance.

It had all been so simple when Philippa was little. When a mother is nurse and playmate and oracle in one, and the child is still a child, it is always simple. But later, who is to solve the problems that arise?

Not the woman-child, impatient of authority, yearning for she knows not what, conscious of having outgrown the nest, yet fretting to suspect herself of ingratitude. Not the mother, half afraid of the stranger who is growing up beside her in place of the helpless babe who was once laid in her bosom; half fearful lest her love be weakness, her grief selfishness, and her bewilderment only want of faith in her child and her God.

Yet when the mutual early dependence has been whole-hearted this spiritual rupture must

be endured, must be felt by both. By the mother in proportion to her capacity for spiritual suffering; by the child, perhaps only a little, a very little at the moment, but almost certainly again later, in the retrospect, when the mother, it may be, can feel no more.

Catherine's thoughts wandered from the garden, at which she gazed so earnestly, to the parting of that morning, when Philippa—afflicted with the self-consciousness of youth, in addition to her large inheritance of the Adelstane dignity—had avoided all demonstration of farewell as far as possible.

"Mother, *please*, don't come to the station to see me off. Let me drive Roper in the pony carriage down to the Abbey this morning, and start with Cousin Augusta, as she said."

"Very well, my darling," said Catherine, and added humorously, "but if I promised not to disgrace you by breaking down, Phil?"

"How can you be *sure* you won't break down?" said Philippa suspiciously. "No, no, and that horrid Lady Grace will be there."

"Don't you like Lady Grace? I thought her so pleasant and amiable," said Catherine, in surprise.

"She looks down on me, and she is always shut up in Cousin Augusta's boudoir, talking and laughing by the hour together," said Philippa jealously. "She treats me as though I were a

little girl. One comfort is she'll have to go off to her horrid old flat directly we go to London, then I shall have Cousin Augusta all to myself."

Catherine knew not whether to sigh or to smile at this fervent aspiration, so certain was she that it must prove illusory.

Philippa had stipulated so earnestly for no parting words, that her mother was almost afraid to speak for fear of disturbing her easily ruffled composure.

"It's bad enough to have to go through it all with Aunt Dulcinea, one expects her to cry over one every time one comes back safely from a stroll round the garden; but I can't stand it from you, mummy," she said impatiently; "you know I mean to be as careful and good as anything—there, I promise. And I'll write to you regularly. Don't, don't begin reminding me not to get my feet wet and things like that."

"No, no, I won't," said Catherine, and she swallowed a thousand anxious injunctions, contenting herself with lecturing Roper upon the care of Philippa's health. "Only remember, my darling, I am always here, ready to fly to you at any moment if you want me, or get into the slightest trouble or difficulty."

"Mother, as if I didn't know that. Am I going to the end of the world?" cried Philippa; and the last careless kiss was given, the bright face

smiled from the gate upon the sad face in the porch, and the child was gone.

Aunt Dulcinea departed on her usual round of visits, after warmly offering to remain and bear Catherine company.

"But, indeed, dear, I believe it would be better for you to come out with me. What a fine opportunity for you to begin a little good work! Reading to poor Granny Weston, for instance, who never leaves her bed. It would take your thoughts off the child. Oh, Catherine, I can't help wishing you had gone with her," said Miss Dulcinea, "I am so afraid you will fret, alone with a dull old person like me."

"I have too much to do here to go out in the morning, Auntie. That is *your* work, to do the visiting and reading," said Catherine, smiling, "and I like very much to be alone now and then. You know Philippa has scarcely been at home at all since Cecil and Augusta came back. No, no, you must toddle round as usual. Let me see, it's your day for lunching with old Miss Nutt, and tea at the parsonage. I will send the pony-carriage for you at about six."

"Well, if you are sure you don't mind, darling. I don't like to disappoint Miss Nutt, and the luncheon prepared, and all. And she will want to hear about the picnic, and Philippa's going to London, you know, and everything."

Catherine was not very sorry to see Miss Dul-

cinea off. She helped her tie on the brown mushroom hat which hung in the hall, found her walking-stick, and saw that the old-fashioned round basket she carried on her arm, in the shelter of her grey cloak, was properly filled with the little gifts the poor lady loved to distribute.

But when this old sister of mercy had departed, instead of going at once to her daily work in the dairy or elsewhere, Catherine went upstairs, and looked sadly about her empty silent room, and at Philippa's little white bed next her own. Inanimate things that have no voices when human beings are present speak very loudly sometimes in their absence. To Catherine's listening heart a thousand voices surged in the silence. She felt in this moment a melancholy foretaste of what life would be when her child, in the course of nature, passed altogether out of her daily existence. The thought was intolerable, and she went downstairs and into the garden to escape it. There she sat upon the bench beneath the fig-tree, and, unmindful of the brightness of the summer morning, shed a few quiet tears.

The click of the latch of the garden gate caused her to look up in surprise. Visitors did not often find their way up to Shepherd's Rest in the morning.

"Oh, David, I am very glad to see you. It was good of you to come," she cried, hastening to meet him, "you knew that she had started?"

"She—who—oh, Philippa! I beg your pardon. Of course I knew she was going to-day, but I am afraid I have come on selfish errands of my own," he said, looking down upon her with some concern, as he noted the signs of weeping on her soft pale face. "Why, you are not so unhappy over it as all that, little Catherine, are you?"

"I am afraid you will laugh at me," said Catherine, and she tried to smile through her tears.

"You are laughing at yourself! Tears because Philippa has left you for how long—a week—three weeks—a month? Why, Catherine, you are growing morbid, shut up in this little nest."

"Perhaps so," she said wistfully. "It sounds absurd, I know, but even now I long to pack up and follow her, if I were not ashamed——"

"Why not?"

"You heard her say—you know—she wanted to go by herself," Catherine faltered.

"To be sure; so would you and I at her age," he said warmly. "She is too old to be treated like a baby."

"She seems little more than a baby to me sometimes," Catherine admitted.

"Nonsense, she is a woman. Why, she would make two of you! And a very princess of dignity. Far better able to take care of herself than you are," he said, smiling. Then his manner changed to remorseful tenderness.

"Am I very, very unsympathetic? Poor little Catherine."

"Oh, David, David, you are so like Delia when you speak like that. It makes me able to talk to you more openly than I could to others, for I feel almost as though I were talking to her once more. I am so afraid I have been selfish, not giving Philippa proper chances, not facing the world as I should. I torment myself thinking so, and now I feel so unfit to begin. I have no one to advise me—who understands," said Catherine, with trembling lip. "Perhaps old Lady Sarah might, but she always said I was wrong to shut myself up here. You are a man of the world, David, what do you think I ought to have done?"

"What does it matter what you ought to have done? It is no use to think about that, since you can't go back," said David decidedly. "You did the best you could, according to your judgment at the time; and I should like to know how you could have done better, or how you could wish Philippa different. You have brought her up splendidly. She is at home among her father's people, and familiar with her future inheritance. Talk of English girls, she is the very ideal of an English girl. Fair and healthy, and transparently innocent and sincere."

"Oh, David, how you comfort me! Yes, my darling is all that," cried Catherine, flushing a little proudly.

"What more do you want?" he said, "you've helped to make her all that. And yet you are afraid to trust her away from you for a few days!"

"I am not exactly afraid of trusting her. Indeed she is very high-principled—in her way," said Catherine, smiling, "far more anxious to do the right thing than I am myself. She reminds me a little of Cecil."

"I cannot see the resemblance," said David. "Cecil is a good fellow, but he is as cold as an iceberg, and as dull as ditchwater. No, no, she may owe her beautiful profile to the Adelstanes, but she owes her high principles to you."

"I have done my best," said Catherine wistfully, "I am shocked to remember how few principles I began life with. No one told me anything. I have had to evolve them from my own experience and convictions."

"Those are the principles to which one can never be false," he said gravely.

There was a pause, and then he spoke with something of Delia's eagerness and certainty of sympathy.

"And now may I speak of my own troubles? For to tell you the truth I came to ask consolation and not to administer it. We are rather in a tangle down at Bridescombe."

"Is it little Lily?"

"Yes. How did you guess?"

"I saw signs of something brewing with Clara at the picnic. I suppose what you said the other day opened my eyes. And I watched Lily. She was so unlike her usual little moping self when she was playing with you. But you are right, David. The child is not happy and she is not well. To be sure, she said she had a headache!"

"She always has a headache," said David bluntly. "Catherine, I want you to take her in for a bit."

"I!" said Catherine, startled.

"Will you?"

"Will I? Oh, David, can you ask? Delia's child! Is it your idea?"

"Well," he said, laughing quietly, "I may say it is Lily's idea."

"But what will Mrs. Chilcott say?"

"You are as bad as George! But he will not consult his mother about this. He wishes it as much as I do. He has just discovered that Lily's little noddle is not so empty as he supposed. Her poor little journal has come to light, and with it what Clara is pleased to call the revelation of Lily's true character. Oh, Catherine, as I read, the years seemed to roll backward, and I heard my little sister Delia talking to me. Poor old George is quite overcome by the discovery that a worm will turn. In other words, that a child who is terrorised morning, noon, and night resorts to fibbing."

"David, if Clara were set over me——"

"Exactly. So should I. But poor old George wouldn't. Partly because he's innately honest and partly because he's innately stupid. So he's as miserable as possible. Determined to rescue Lily's morals, and not knowing how to do it without seeming to insult his mother. So I suggested coming up to consult you—unbeknown, of course, to Aunt Lydia. At least, I hope so!"

The humorous alarm of his expression caused Catherine to reflect that after all, David being but mortal man, he probably disliked the prospect of a scene with two angry women as much as poor George himself.

"How would it be," she said—"you know they think *me* very artful, and perhaps I am a little—if *I* came down and asked for Lily to stay with me while Philippa was away? Then they could blame me, and it would be less uncomfortable for you and George. And nothing need be explained to Lily."

"Catherine, you are an angel!" He took her hand and kissed it, and she was so unused—poor Catherine—to the ghost of a caress, that the gentle gallantry of his salute caused her to blush with confusion.

"Perhaps she will console you a little," he said presently, "for Philippa's absence."

She shook her head, smiled, and sighed, looking

round the little garden which lay before them in the full warmth of the morning sunshine, though the bench where they were seated was pleasantly shaded. But she saw only the vision of her daughter's bright face, all smiles and gladness—as she had seen it last. Yet she thought Philippa had cast a backward glance over her shoulder as she turned away; as though she, too, were conscious that she was leaving her childhood behind her for ever, and was taking a mute, hurried, half-frightened farewell.

With a start Catherine's attention was recalled to the guelder rose nodding over the roof of the garden shed, upon which David's eyes were fixed.

"We used to call them snowballs," he said, indicating the round white blossoms with the point of his stick. "What's the real name?"

She told him.

"Philippa called them porridge-balls, I don't know why," said Catherine, and the foolish recollection filled her eyes with tears again; she saw the baby Philippa running over the little lawn in her white frock and red shoes so very plainly just then.

"Suppose I invited myself to lunch with you," said David suddenly.

"Will you? It would be a great pleasure. But I must order something more substantial. Augusta says I live like a Spartan."

"She has not many opportunities of judging, I should gather."

"No, she has not. But she lunched here once and that was enough. And then Roper was to the fore. Now I have only my village maiden, and I am afraid I prefer my own cooking to hers. You are not like the others to be shocked!"

His laugh rang through the quiet cottage as he followed Catherine, stooping his tall head to enter the low doorway.

The little maid had arranged Catherine's frugal lunch on the round table in the window of the old-fashioned entrance: once farm kitchen and living-room, now by courtesy the hall. The day was hot, but the thickness of the cob walls and high-pitched roof made the interior of the cottage cool, and the square lattice stood open. The honeysuckle blew in and swung round the frame which held the living picture of blooming garden and green countryside. On the snowy cloth stood a home-baked loaf, a plate of lettuce, a red pitcher of milk, some frozen yellow butter, and an iced junket heaped with clotted cream.

"A refrigerator is my pet luxury," said Catherine. "It is extraordinary to me how many people in small country houses grudge the expense of ice, and are contented to speckle their own and their visitors' cups of tea with sour milk and curdling cream. I was going to make

myself an omelette, David, but you shall have something more substantial."

She flitted cheerfully away to the kitchen and larder, surprised at her own good spirits. "There is something in a man's presence which disperses the primness and dulness of a house like magic," she thought to herself; and the little handmaid thought so too, as she followed her mistress in a flutter of pleasure and surprise, and anxiety that the gentleman should have everything he could possibly desire.

The luncheon was actually a merry one, though Catherine would not have conceived it possible that the first meal she sat down to after Philippa's departure could be a cheerful one.

There was a curious sense of comradeship; a restful certainty that her thoughts could be translated into words without fear of misunderstanding; she was used to being continually on guard in the presence of her child, before whom it was inexpedient to speak openly of all that was in her heart and mind; and who was besides a severe though unconscious critic of her mother's words and ways, as Catherine was ruefully aware. Miss Dulcinea heard imperfectly, was apt to require much explanation, and given to retailing very innocently matter too insignificant in itself not to gain in the telling. Conversation had, in fact, to be suited to Miss Dulcinea's age quite as carefully as to Philippa's youth. The two

could say what they chose to her; it was her business to console, to advise, and to listen. But here was equality of age, independence, and understanding.

Catherine forgot her unhappiness and David his anxiety about little Lily; they talked of Delia —not sadly, but recalling characteristics of her youth, and the memories they had in common; and presently David spoke a little, and briefly, of his work, enough to show Catherine that it absorbed the greater part of his interest in life. As he talked it seemed to her as though her horizon widened and lifted, and she caught a glimpse of a great world teeming with life and action, beyond this little silent rustic Paradise of hers, the world upon which she had turned her back in her youth.

How small and petty and narrow must her existence seem to him, she reflected sorrowfully, oblivious of the charm with which the haven of a settled home is invested to the mind of a life-long wanderer.

After luncheon David smoked a cigarette in the garden, and listened to the loud song of a thrush in the cherry-tree. He reflected rather dreamily and tenderly upon the peace of this quiet cottage among the hills, and wished, perhaps, for the space of a few seconds, that he had such a shelter waiting for him somewhere in the wide world. Poor little Catherine! David was in years actually her senior, and yet he was acutely

conscious of the fact that her life was over, while his lay before him yet, full of possibilities and hope and ambitions.

"Her voice is plaintive," he thought, "even though it is sweet, and there is a wistful look in her eyes, which were beautiful eyes once and are beautiful yet, though the lustre of youth has departed. What a lovely colour she had in those days when we went primrosing—seventeen years ago—eighteen, by Jove! How pale and gentle she is now. Poor little Catherine!"

He thought indulgently of her grief at parting with her daughter even for a few weeks. It was natural that she should grudge the sharing of her treasure with others, just as it was natural the child should wish to go.

His heart was very tender towards Catherine as she came out presently, dressed for walking, and they set forth together on their mission to Bridescombe.

CHAPTER IX

INSTEAD of allowing Lord John Trelleck to escort her back to town immediately after Whitsuntide, as Augusta had planned, Lady Sarah chose to remain at the Abbey until the very day when Lady Adelstane's engagements obliged her to return to town. Lady Sarah did not, however, propose to travel *en famille*, and therefore departed by the early morning train, with her dog, her maid, and her footman in attendance; after taking an unusually affectionate farewell of her grandson, who was detained in the country by business, and of her hostess.

"I like to travel alone, Augusta, and not to feel it necessary to bawl across a railway carriage; nor to be bawled at, for that matter, even by the pleasantest companion in the world, as I am sure, my love, you must be. As soon as you are settled down, send Philippa to see me. I shall like to see how she looks when she is properly dressed, and I hope that *farouche* manner of hers will presently disappear. Be sure you don't have her stuffed with a quantity of useless lessons. Take her about and let her amuse herself."

"That is exactly what I mean to do," said Augusta comfortably. For once she was quite in accord with Lady Sarah.

"Of course, she is not *out*," she said, suddenly mindful of her promise to Catherine, "but there are many little things a girl can very well enjoy before she comes out."

"My dear, I was married at her age," said Lady Sarah, who was never tired of recalling the circumstance; "I have been thinking who there is that might do for Philippa. Of course my poor cousin Kentisbury's boy comes to one's mind. He has had a long minority, and, though his father was a sad scamp, this young man has been very carefully brought up by his mother, and she is dying to get him safely married, or if she is not, she ought to be; for he is just at the age when young men are apt to make fools of themselves. I will give her a hint. I have no doubt he is just the husband for Philippa, though I can't say I know him at all yet."

But Augusta had met the young man twice, so felt justified in stating that she knew him very well indeed, and that he was perfectly charming.

"The fact is, I intend to get him to a boy and girl dinner party for the Lundys' dance," she said, immediately adding his name to a mental list she had compiled. "That is to be quite a small affair, her girl is only seventeen."

"I thought Catherine stipulated for no dances," said Lady Sarah maliciously.

"Of course I must use my discretion—when it comes to boy and girl affairs," said Augusta, with dignity. "One would not take her to a ball."

"I wish you would toddle over to Bridescombe with me," said Mrs. Ralt confidentially to Lady Grace Trumoin. "Gussie has made one excuse after another until there is only this morning left, and I really *am* keen on going to look at George Chilcott's stud-farm before we start."

"I should be only too pleased if Augusta would not mind."

"My dear good girl, she's a hundred things distracting her, besides making sure that Lady Sarah does not miss her train. And I must positively get a little exercise before the motor comes round."

"So must I, now I come to think of it. What a shame to return to London on a morning like this," said Lady Grace.

They took a pleasant way under the limes, beside the wide avenue that led to the village. A laurel hedge formed a sheltering wall on the one side of the footpath, and the lime branches swept the grass bank on the other.

The day was breathlessly hot, but the thick foliage arching overhead permitted no ray of

sun to penetrate the cool twilight of this green colonnade.

"Why do you go back to town then? Come North with us; we shall have a pleasant trip. No stuffy railway for us," said the cheerful Blanche. "Ralte is as pretty in its way as this. No—not so pretty," she added conscientiously, "but at least a million times better than London!"

"You are very kind, but I am afraid I must return."

"Come later then. You know, you and I could be very good pals," said Blanche frankly. "As one grows older one finds no companionship so pleasant as that of the people one has known all one's life. Nothing to explain away, and all allusions to the past comprehended. Saves so much trouble," said Blanche, with her jolly laugh.

Lady Grace was aware that Blanche was in many ways more companionable than Augusta, whose selfishness became at times as fatiguing to witness as to endure. She was also aware that Blanche, though outspoken and rough in her manner, was by no means the eccentric vulgarian that her sister, in conversation with her intimates, represented her to be.

Sir Cecil's estimate of his sister-in-law had been powerfully affected by the misquotations of her sayings and doings and the apocryphal anecdotes of her past which Augusta had indulged in for

years, without the slightest appreciation of her own inaccuracy. But Lady Adelstane's friends were less blind than her husband to her idiosyncrasies, and were thus apt to discount her remarks. Lady Grace had too much good sense to allow her own calm judgment to be distorted by the prejudices of Augusta.

She observed the curious fact that the twins differed in character as widely as in appearance.

Blanche was outwardly self-assertive, though inwardly the very soul of generosity and good nature, while Augusta's amiable manner covered a grasping and tenacious disposition.

"She cares for nothing and nobody in the world but herself and her own comfort," thought Lady Grace. But she was Augusta's chosen friend of the moment, and had accepted much hospitality from her, and she knew that any display of intimacy with Blanche would be tantamount to disloyalty in the eyes of the jealous younger sister. It would not be "playing the game."

Therefore she could not immediately respond to Mrs. Ralt's overtures.

"Perhaps, later, if you are so kind as to ask me again," she said, reflecting that by the end of the summer Augusta's affection would probably have cooled down.

"You can write and tell me any time you're free," said Blanche, winking openly and cheerfully

at her companion in order to indicate that she understood the situation perfectly, "fit in any odd moments, you know, to suit yourself, between more attractive invitations. Bob and I are a dull couple; but, however, he suits me, and I suit him. The great thing is to marry for companionship when all is said and done, since love in the nature of things is bound to be evanescent. I don't know that we ever pretended to be in love with each other. But first we hobnobbed over horses, and now we hobnob over motors. Look here, I will show you a capital short cut to Bridescombe if you don't mind going through the churchyard and across a couple of fields."

"Far pleasanter than the high road," said Lady Grace.

"I know no prettier churchyard," said Blanche, threading her way among the quiet hillocks and old moss-grown headstones to the turnstile in the low wall, over which the foxgloves were nodding in profusion above the fern, on the outskirts of the adjacent orchard. "Here we are on George Chilcott's land, and very good land it is, poor fellow."

"Why poor fellow? He appears to be well off. I like George Chilcott," said Lady Grace languidly.

"Then I wish you'd marry him. Somebody ought to marry him, and if you like him I do not see why it should not be you," said Mrs. Ralt, with great animation.

"I should be delighted, of course, but he hasn't asked me."

"Of course he hasn't asked you. He's not had a chance. He'd ask you fast enough if he had, I make no doubt. And now I come to think of it," said Blanche, pursuing her idea with great interest, "you would be the very person to tackle that awful mother and sister. Now, do be sensible, Grace; I'm very fond of George Chilcott, and he's one of the best fellows in the world. I always call him Nathaniel, because in him there is no guile; or was it Nicodemus? I declare I forget! Anyway I call him Nathaniel. I'll get him to Ralt this summer if you 'll only come."

"Of course I'll come," said Lady Grace, and she smiled so calmly that Blanche could not be certain whether she were in jest or in earnest.

George Chilcott, unaware of these plans for his future happiness, sat wearily in his study, with the local newspaper in his hand, pretending to read; and wishing that after all he had walked to Shepherd's Rest with David, instead of waiting passively at home to hear the result of his embassy to Catherine.

Becoming aware of footsteps on the gravel path, he looked up impatiently, expecting to see Clara once more; but instead he perceived Lady Grace, in her pretty summer dress, with a flounced parasol shading her delicate face. Though her features were too thin and too marked for actual

beauty, her whole appearance was that of an exquisitely well-bred and graceful woman, whose good looks were thrown into high relief by the pronounced plainness of her companion's face and attire.

George Chilcott came through the open casement to greet them with an acute sensation of relief and pleasure; he had been in the shadow of disgrace with his own womenkind all day, and it was agreeable to meet the sunshine of Lady Grace's charming smile.

"Do forgive us for turning up at this unseasonable hour. I assure you we were going to ring at the front door-bell. But we're off to-day; Grace to town by the afternoon train, and I to motor with Bob. So as I'd made up my mind to come over before we left, and have a look at the gees, why here we are!" cried Mrs. Ralt heartily.

"I disclaim all responsibility," said Lady Grace gaily.

At this moment old Mrs. Chilcott, attended by Clara, came round the corner of the house upon them, as they stood in the centre of the path.

Both ladies wore the severe and mournful aspect of persons who have but recently participated in a painful scene; and as neither was versed in the art of disguising her feelings, both continued to wear it, so that the greeting and shaking hands with Mrs. Ralt and the presentation of Lady

Grace to old Mrs. Chilcott, whom she had not previously met, were but melancholy ceremonies.

Mrs. Ralt's cheerful explanations of her early intrusion were received with mournful incredulity by Clara and chilling gravity by her mother, and George cut them short.

"We'll go at once. Excuse me, I'll get a hat." He dashed in and dashed out again. "It's only a few yards to the stables—but as you are in a hurry——"

"I think the garden is far more in my line," said Lady Grace, "perhaps I may be allowed to wait for you here?" she looked at Mrs. Chilcott for permission.

Mrs. Ralt was about to protest, but she suddenly recollected that for the success of her plans it might be as well that Lady Grace should make acquaintance with her destined mother-in-law.

"Well—we sha'n't be long. In fact, we daren't be long," she shouted over her shoulder as she strode off beside the squire.

"Something disagreeable has happened," thought Lady Grace, who had observed that George did not look at his relatives, and who read the expression of their faces very clearly; and she exerted herself to make conversation of the kind she thought they would prefer.

"How very beautiful your garden is looking."

"It is considered pretty, I believe," said Mrs.

Chilcott sternly, as though she had no opinion on the matter personally. "Of course we do not pretend to compare it with the gardens at the Abbey."

"I think your roses are even finer. What a magnificent Niphetos. It is my favourite rose."

"My son is a great gardener. He gives a great deal of attention to his rose-trees."

"It is an odd thing for a gentleman to do," said Clara solemnly.

"It is a fascinating study. I used to bud roses," said Lady Grace.

"Do you live in the country?" said Clara.

"Alas, no! I live in a small and solitary flat in town, to which I am returning to-day."

"Then you cannot have much opportunity for gardening.'

"I have none at all now, I am sorry to say!"

"I should have thought a house would have been more private than a flat, if you live alone," said Miss Clara.

"You are quite right," said Lady Grace, smiling, "but a flat has one convenience—some people think it the only one—you can shut it up and go away."

Neither of her auditors smiled.

"Then I cannot see the good of having one, if it is no more use than that," said Clara.

"Nobody cares to stay at home, I believe,

nowadays," said Mrs. Chilcott, without relaxing her disapproving attitude.

"My brother is going to stay in a flat in London next week with our relative Colonel David Moore," said Clara; "it is only a furnished flat. I do not think he will be so comfortable as in his own house."

"I am quite sure he won't," said Lady Grace.

"It's in Buckingham Gate Mansions, and it belongs to a brother officer, who has lent it to Colonel Moore."

"A most convenient situation," said Lady Grace politely. "Mine is on the other side of the Park—a long way off."

"I wonder you like to live the wrong side of the Park," said Clara impressively.

"The wrong side? I don't know why I do," said Lady Grace vaguely; and thought to herself, "after all, I rather wish I had gone with the others."

Mrs. Ralt did not, as she declared, dare to linger unduly over her inspection of the Bridescombe stud; but walking to the farm was an affair of ten minutes, and the Shire horses had to be examined and discussed, so that nearly three quarters of an hour elapsed before her return, during which time even Lady Grace, who was usually proficient in small talk, had exhausted her conversational powers. She gave vent to something very like a sigh of relief when her

friend appeared, somewhat overheated by her rapid progress, and chatting loudly with the stalwart squire, whose good humour had been obviously restored in her cheerful company.

"Must you go? I wish you would stay to luncheon," he cried with much sincerity; for indeed he dreaded the coming meal, when he must presently sit opposite his offended parent, with his disapproving sister on one side, and his penitent child—or, worse still, her vacant chair to remind him of her misdeeds—on the other. "Won't you stay?"

"No, no, it would be more than our places are worth," said Mrs. Ralt, shaking hands all round without delay. "Come, Grace, we must run for it, and it's not weather for running."

"You had better go through the shrubbery. I'll show you the way. It is by far the coolest path," cried George zealously.

"Thank you, we will. By the bye, where is Grace's little friend?" said Mrs. Ralt, suddenly recollecting her deep-laid schemes.

George paused imperceptibly before muttering that she was not very well, and his mutter was overborne by Clara's conscientious explanation.

"Lady Grace has already asked for her. I was sorry to be obliged to tell her that Lily has not been at all good," she said, with a severity intended for Lily's father. "And she is consequently in disgrace, and has had to be punished."

"I can feel for her. We shall be in disgrace when we get back," cried Mrs. Ralt, with her loudest laugh. But Lady Grace looked straight before her with an expression which was not lost upon those piercing black eyes set in Mrs. Chilcott's wrinkled face. Her continuous sharpness had hitherto failed to shake her guest's unfailing graciousness in the very slightest degree, and Mrs. Chilcott was piqued; she thought she perceived a vulnerable point at last and attacked without hesitation.

"I suppose you disapprove of our old-fashioned methods. I believe nowadays modern children escape all discipline, and are allowed to do and say exactly what they choose," she said with almost an offensive intonation.

Lady Grace looked at her calmly. "I disapprove of the theory of punishment—yes," she said lightly but very distinctly. "I believe it to be a relic of barbarism. Reform, not revenge—is my motto. But I dare say I am quite wrong, you know," she added with a charming smile. "There are generally two sides to every question, aren't there?"

George perceived that Mrs. Chilcott was angry; but his admiration for Lady Grace rose very high. He felt none of the discomfort and alarm which had assailed him in former years, on the rare occasions when Delia had encountered his autocratic parent. Delia had then shown hot sparks

of a temper hardly inferior to Mrs. Chilcott's own; and, losing her self-control, had taken part in the violent scenes which had embittered existence at Bridescombe since George's earliest recollections. She had declared that her only safety lay in flight, and during her lifetime avoided her husband's family as much as possible. But here was different mettle. Lady Grace was cold, smiling, gracious; her self-command was absolute. He realised that here was a woman fully capable of fighting Lily's battles or her own, without growing angry at all.

"I suppose you are a Radical," gasped Mrs. Chilcott.

"I suppose I am," said Lady Grace, smiling yet more graciously. "Not when they are in the majority, however. I am always for the weaker side." Her calm blue eyes met the fiery gaze of George's mother, and Mrs. Chilcott knew that for the second time that day she had encountered a spirit stronger than her own.

"What do you think of her, mamma?" asked Clara, before the two ladies and their escort were well out of sight.

"I think she is a very artful woman," said Mrs. Chilcott angrily. "After the way in which you told me she behaved the other day, petting Lily, and driving home in the dogcart with George. I consider her coming over here just another proof that she is making up to him in the

most barefaced manner. But I hope I showed her that her foolish attempts at flattering me made no impression, even though she does happen to be the daughter of an ex-Cabinet minister."

"Her father was a very celebrated man, though," said Miss Clara, awestruck at her mother's contempt for the great Lord Magloire's only child.

"Of course he was in his day. But that is no reason why his daughter should be languid and affected," said Mrs. Chilcott sharply. "He left no fortune at all. Every one knows that, and a great many things were said about him both before and after his death."

"I thought she must be badly off to live all by herself in a flat," said Clara, and she beamed with odd satisfaction; taking almost equal pleasure in the fact of Lady Grace's poverty and her own perspicuity in discovering it.

Catherine, too, had an unpleasant quarter of an hour to face at Bridescombe, when she sat opposite Mrs. Chilcott and Clara in the morning-room, after delivering her invitation to her godchild. But expostulations, satire, and indignation were now alike wasted upon George, who would not, after all, permit Catherine to bear the brunt of battle unsupported; but first announced his determination that Lily should accept the invitation immediately, and then sat in sullen silence while the child's preparations were being made;

and while Catherine endeavoured in vain to soften the indignation of her aunt and cousin, by dwelling upon her own loneliness, and the kindness it would be to her to spare her this little companion until Philippa's return. One barbed arrow from Mrs. Chilcott's inexhaustible quiver flew straight to her niece's heart.

"I wonder you should care to undertake the charge of another child when every one knows you can't manage your own, Catherine."

Poor Catherine was white and trembling by the time she had uttered her farewells, and found herself seated by George's side in the dogcart, with Lily squeezed between them, and her minute trunk on the back seat with the groom.

Lily herself was as silent as her elders; frightened, yet possessed by a secret joy and amazement.

Was it possible that her dream of dreams was after all to be fulfilled, and that she was going to stay at Shepherd's Rest with her godmother, in her wonderful cottage full of books, and away from her Aunt Clara?

Though she clung to her father's neck when he set her down at the rustic gate and kissed her very seriously and bade her be a good girl—it was with an almost incredulous sensation of bliss that she saw him actually depart, leaving her behind. Up to the last moment, and even after she had seen her small trunk borne upstairs to

the bedroom under the brown eaves, Lily had feared he might change his mind, and decide upon some less extraordinary form of reprisal for her misdeeds.

Her grandmother's parting speech, that to be sent away from home as a punishment was the most fearful disgrace that could befall a little girl, weighed down her mind with a secret sense of guilt that made her even paler and quieter than usual as she followed Catherine into the cottage.

She was awed by the gentleness with which her godmother lifted her presently on to her knee, and put both arms round her, and laid her own tired face against the child's soft dark curls. Was it possible that Cousin Catherine was crying?

Lily's self-control gave way upon this conviction and she burst into tears herself, and sobbed passionately with her thin arms tightening convulsively round Catherine's neck. She thought it must be her own wickedness that had caused those tears to flow.

"Oh I will be good, I will be good. I'm sorry, indeed I'm sorry," she cried, hiding her face against that soft bosom in an outburst of childish shame and misery.

George came to Shepherd's Rest to bid his little girl farewell before going to town, and was startled to come suddenly upon his child flying like the wind across the lawn, her dark curls blowing about her cheeks, and her eyes bright

with laughter. He flushed a dull red all over his heavy face when she stopped short at sight of him; he could not help seeing that the merriment died out of her wide eyes.

"Are you afraid of me, Lily?" he asked.

"No, papa," she said nervously, but her nervousness was explained by the faltering question, "Have you come to take me away?"

"No, to say good-bye," said George, and his heart ached to see the quick look of relief.

"David is right, she has been unhappy," he thought sadly.

He took some comfort, however, in the demonstration of affection and welcome which followed his assurances that she was to stay at Shepherd's Rest for the present, and they walked about hand in hand, while she showed him, with newborn importance, her favourite corners of the garden.

David followed with Catherine, and was well content with the improvement in Lily's looks, and the obvious success of his experiment.

"After all," he said, "it's not very wonderful she should be happy here. It's a child's Paradise. What a bower of beauty you have managed to make of poor old Tedburn's farm."

"You should see her dairy," said George proudly, "and her new cider-press. She beats me there, I can tell you. There isn't a farm in the country, of the size, that can hold a candle to

hers. I would never believe it could be the work of a woman."

This was the highest praise George knew how to bestow, and he gave utterance to it with honest warmth.

"Oh, George, I owe nearly all I have learnt to you," said Catherine, who was cast in far too feminine a mould to resent any such assumption of manly superiority; and who therefore took her cousin's praise as it was meant, in simple good faith.

She led the way through her red-tiled house-place, and down the worn step beneath the sunken archway, into her dairy. Here stood rows of bright tin pails holding newly-scalded milk covered with wrinkled yellow cream; and the great red earthen bowl where the clotted cream already skimmed was heaped in rich and luscious folds.

The wooden churn, scoured to whiteness, lay sunning itself on the high window-sill, where the rays penetrated through the green curtain of leaves, into the fresh cool twilight of grey stone arches, granite flags, and rows of slated shelves.

A low doorway in the north wall led through a dim porch into the farmyard; and here George began a tour of inspection which only ended at tea-time, when they were summoned to a feast of strawberries and home-baked cakes, spread upon a little white-covered table in the porch.

Soon after partaking of this refreshment the

two men took their leave and went away together, pausing simultaneously to wave farewell before turning the corner of the lane which hid from view the garden where Catherine stood, in her grey gown and shady hat, holding Lily's hand.

In their ears rang her parting words of entreaty: "I am taking care of your child. Do what you can for mine."

"Trust *me*. If there were anything, anything —but what could she want?" David had said, looking kindly and laughing into those wistful hazel eyes. But George had wrung Catherine's hand in silence. He knew not how to express the gratitude which filled him, save by that mighty and painful grip.

CHAPTER X

THE Adelstanes' house in Belgrave Square had been newly painted in the spring, and consequently presented a clean white front to the passers-by, and was further ornamented by window-boxes and hanging baskets of pink ivy geraniums, and gay awnings of striped red and white canvas.

The green leaves fluttering across the black trunks of the trees in the Square were still fresh and bright, and afforded an agreeable shade to Philippa when she walked round and round the gravel paths in the morning, with Roper, to exercise Augusta's French pug.

Lady Adelstane had taken great pleasure, the day after her arrival in town, in driving her young cousin round to various dressmakers, tailors, and milliners, and ordering clothes and hats for her; which she did with the more liberality since it was quite understood that the bills were to be sent in to Catherine.

The subsequent fittings rendered necessary by these orders, however, Augusta had neither leisure nor inclination to attend; so, since Roper

was too inexperienced a Londoner to be of much use, she was obliged to send her own maid with Philippa, and highly inconvenient she presently found such obligation to be.

"It gives her an excuse, you see, to be out whenever I want her," she lamented to Lady Grace; "besides which it turns out that Roper does not know her way about London at all. I cannot think what possessed Catherine to send such a fool. Philippa must walk out with somebody. I cannot have her with me for ever, you know, and she finds it tedious to go out in the Square."

"She is a very pretty girl; I had no idea she was so handsome. You have dressed her quite charmingly," said Lady Grace. "It is extraordinary what a difference *clothes* make. I admire her although she does not like me. It amuses me to see her draw her brows together whenever I appear."

"The fact is, she is jealous of you," said Augusta, with great complacency. "She cannot bear anybody to speak to me but herself. It is really embarrassing at times, for you know one can talk of next to nothing before a girl of that age." Augusta was uneasily conscious that Philippa's great blue eyes had been fixed wonderingly upon her already during many a pleasant chat with an acquaintance. "I wish Cecil were in town to take her off my hands, instead of dawdling

away his time over imaginary business at Welwysbere. He could take her to see the sights. Imagine, she wanted to go to the Hippodrome! She is mad about performing monkeys and things of that sort, and there I had to send her—she is very insistent—with Holland and her own old dunderhead of a maid, whom I am positively afraid to send about with her. And I was going to one of that delightful German's lectures with Florrie Brooke, where I could not possibly take her, you know, as Florrie wasn't even sure what it was about."

"And what was it about?"

"I forget now—it was the day before yesterday. But it was a great take-in. Quite dull and humdrum. Nothing *risqué* at all. However, every one was there."

"So I heard."

"I have taken Philippa twice to the Opera, but she hates music, and got a headache from the bad air, and looked like a ghost next day. Really girls are very tiresome things. And now she has taken it into her head that she mustn't go to the Lundys' because she promised her mother she wouldn't go to dances. I do think it very odd of Catherine to exact such promises from her when she is under my wing. She ought to have trusted to me. I said I wouldn't take her to dances. Of course I didn't mean childish things like the Lundys'," added Augusta, hastily. "The

fact is, Philippa is too old and too young. I can't send her to bed when I dine out, and I can't take her with me; so there she sits by herself, with nothing to do, making me feel as though I were neglecting her."

"She ought to have a governess," said Lady Grace, sympathetically. "After all, one really only begins one's education at sixteen."

"Her mother has always taught her herself, so absurdly out of date, though I must say she speaks French very well," said Augusta, discontentedly. "Of course, Catherine was brought up in France, so there is nothing in that."

"It's no credit to her then," said Lady Grace, with a twinkle.

"Not in the least. But the tiresome thing is, I stipulated she was to have holidays here, not dreaming what a bore they would be. Still, I might get a companion," she said, brightening up. "I have often thought of having one myself. They write letters and do tiresome things for one. It would be a very good idea, Grace. I will see about it immediately. It would be delightful for Philippa, and convenient for me."

Augusta generally acted on impulse, and carried out her caprices without giving herself time for reflection; a habit which enabled her to believe herself a remarkably prompt and practical person.

On the very afternoon of her conversation

with Grace Trumoin she drove to a foreign registry office, and engaged a middle-aged Frenchwoman who happened to be personally known to the proprietor of the establishment, and to be possessed of the highest personal references from her last situation.

Augusta was enchanted by her good luck when she interviewed this lady, and found her not only presentable and well-mannered, but willing to enter upon her duties immediately.

It was settled that she should come on the morrow, and Augusta looked forward with some apprehension to breaking the news to Philippa.

A constant stream of visitors from five to seven made it impossible for her to have any private conversation with her young guest during the remainder of the afternoon; though Philippa was present in the drawing-room during these hours, embarrassing her cousin by her constant attention to the conversation, and habit of abruptly stating the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, whenever a question was by any chance addressed to herself.

"She is very *farouche*," sighed Lady Adelstane across the low tea-table to Lady Kentisbury, whom she had invited, as she told Grace, entirely for Philippa's sake, since she had no personal inclination towards dowdy women given to good works. "She is *farouche*, but such a dear! And she leads such a dull life in the depths of Devon,

and her mother never stirs from home. I do want her to have a good time while she is with me, but I haven't an idea how to begin. Do advise me. I know less than nothing about girls."

"Surely, she ought to be in the schoolroom," said Lady Kentisbury, looking at Philippa with a maternal expression, and shaking her head.

"Of course she *ought;* but she is being brought up so oddly," said Augusta, apologetically, "that really ordinary rules don't apply to her. Her mother has educated her entirely herself, so of course she is more advanced than girls who are left to governesses and people. But she has seen nothing of girls and boys of her own age. I assure you Catherine has guarded her like a dragon."

"So I have heard," said Lady Kentisbury. "Lady Sarah tells me that she has devoted her whole life to her child. How charming that is!"

"I am sure you have done the same," said Augusta, vague but complimentary. "And I do hope you will let her see something of your young people while she is with me."

Lady Kentisbury was nothing loth, and, in fact, agreed to the proposal very warmly, and invited Philippa to luncheon on the very next day, for Lady Sarah Adelstane, who was her great-aunt by marriage, had, with her customary promptness, been beforehand with Augusta, and

hinted that her grand-niece might search the United Kingdom in vain for a more suitable daughter-in-law than Philippa.

"Her mother is a saint," the old lady had remarked, "and the girl has never been out of her sight day or night. She is as innocent as a baby, and as pretty as a picture. Of course you will say it is odd she should be trusted to Augusta. But the fact is that was my doing. I overpersuaded her mother. Girls with Philippa's looks and Philippa's expectations don't grow on every gooseberry bush in the country, you know, and hobbledehoys do; and I had no idea of her being snapped up by the parson's son or some one of that kind. Not that the parson at Welwysbere *has* a son, but the principle is the same. One never knows. The women of our family ripen early, and she will marry young or not at all. I know the breed, my love, very well. So I persuaded her mother to send her here. But between you and me, my love, Augusta is the last person in Europe I would have entrusted her to, if I were not so very sure of the girl herself. She has been over-mothered and a trifle spoilt, but she has the very highest principles, and all the strength of mind which so many young men seem to lack nowadays," said Lady Sarah, significantly.

"They do, indeed," said Lady Kentisbury, with a sigh. There was no need for explanation. Both ladies were aware of the possibility of inherited

tendencies in the young Marquis which rendered it highly desirable that his wife should be a person of principle and character. "It would be very charming, dear Aunt Sarah, but of course it could not be at once, as she is so young. However, an engagement steadies a boy more than anything in the world."

"Why should it not be at once," said Lady Sarah, impatiently. "People always put off that sort of thing until the day after the fair. Do but think of the daughter-in-law my nephew Rye presented to my poor sister Maria the day he came of age. As I told her, I blamed her own shortsightedness. She should have found him a suitable wife, tied him up young, and seen that he had a legitimate heir. After that young people must please themselves. One has put them in the right way, you know, and done one's duty by the family, and one can't dry-nurse them for ever. The rest depends on the wife. Philippa is her father's daughter. I don't know that I need say much more than that," said Lady Sarah, and a genuine tear shone in her blue eyes, which were still bright, though set in a network of wrinkles beneath snow-white hair.

"No, indeed," said Lady Kentisbury, warmly. "I always looked up to him as the most nearly perfect human being I ever met."

> "He was a man, take him for all in all,
> I shall not look upon his like again,"

said Lady Sarah, and the tears gave place to a smile. "My love, I must be growing old at last, since I have taken to quoting Shakespeare. However, my poor Philip was not so much a man as a rock; and, now I come to think of it, rocks are apt to be heavy, though very solid to lean against. Philippa is solid and heavy."

"Heavy!" said Lady Kentisbury, alarmed. "If she is not amusing, I am afraid Charlie will never——"

"My dear Jane, wait till he sees her. A boy of that age finds a pretty girl amusing when she says 'How do you do?' And, for heaven's sake, rescue her from Augusta as often as you can!"

"Lady Adelstane has asked me to tea," said Lady Kentisbury.

"*Déjà*," said Lady Sarah, with a laugh.

Philippa was very much pleased to accept Lady Kentisbury's invitation to luncheon, after a dutiful reference to her cousin for permission, which bored Augusta, and pleased her would-be hostess.

"My daughter is a year or two older than you are, but not nearly so tall," she said graciously to her young relative. "She came out last year."

"I wish I were out," said Philippa, with a sigh.

"Are you so fond of gaiety?"

"I don't know," said Philippa, bluntly. "I have not tried. But I should like to go every-

where with Cousin Augusta very much indeed, and I am obliged to stay at home by myself because I am not out, so the evenings are very dull, as I do not care for reading. And it is very tiresome always walking with a maid."

"We must try and get up some boy and girl parties for you," said Lady Kentisbury, sympathetically.

"My mother made me promise not to go to a dance," said Philippa, discontentedly.

"Are you not going to the Lundys'? I understood you were to go."

"I can't. I promised mummie I wouldn't. I have told Cousin Augusta," said Philippa, and her face assumed an obstinate expression that brought out her resemblance to Sir Cecil with odd emphasis.

Lady Kentisbury departed with the conviction that Lady Sarah had correctly described her granddaughter as high-principled; she was naturally unaware of the impatient rebelliousness underlying Philippa's faithful adherence to her mother's command; or of the indignant remonstrances she had addressed to Catherine on the subject.

Philippa was depressed, in spite of the pleasure which Lady Kentisbury's invitation caused her.

She was already beginning, as Lady Sarah had foreseen, to be disillusioned concerning her adored cousin, to turn the severe gaze of her

observant youth—now diverted from her parent—in the direction of Augusta. There were many points concerning Augusta which were ill adapted to sustain such an inspection.

It was scarcely to be wondered at that her hostess was becoming almost nervous in the presence of this tall, severe young vestal, who looked her through and through with grave blue eyes, and faithfully corrected her when she detected her in the slightest inaccuracy.

"Really she is worse than Cecil," thought Augusta, peevishly; but she could not help discovering that Philippa was a great deal more clear-sighted than the solemn, handsome gentleman whom she so nearly resembled.

Augusta's oldest friend and most constant adorer, Major Cymbert, was the last of her callers to leave, and as he stayed late and she was dining out early she had to hasten to her room to dress the instant he departed. Thither, as usual, she felt obliged to invite Philippa to accompany her, though the presence of a child of sixteen may be sometimes embarrassing at the toilet of a lady of forty bent upon making the most of herself; and Augusta was often hard put to it for excuses to get rid of Philippa whilst she administered the finishing touches to the picture she saw reflected in her mirror. But the custom had begun at the Abbey, where her young cousin's innocent admiration of her charms had flattered

Augusta's vanity; and it was not easy to abandon it now she had tired of its continuance without disappointing and offending her worshipper, who was of a somewhat exacting disposition, and accustomed besides to getting her own way.

"It is quite a comfort to me, darling," said Augusta, submitting to the removal of the larger portion of her golden *coiffure* by the dexterous hands of her maid, and contemplating herself without it in the Dresden mirror, with perfect calm and satisfaction, "a real *relief*—that I shall not be obliged to leave you alone in the evenings any longer."

She reflected that this was an excellent way to break the news of the engagement of a companion, to Holland, as well as to Philippa.

Neither could very well express before the other any disapproval of her arrangements.

"Aren't you going out any more? Are you going to stay at home, for my sake!" cried Philippa with the incredulous joy of reviving faith; and Holland raised surprised eyes and looked at her mistress in the glass; her mind was filled with the suspicions begotten of experience.

"My dear! How could I throw over my engagements? Unless I were ill, or having an operation, or something of that kind," said Augusta, reprovingly. "I, who make a point of never disappointing anybody. It is part of my creed. I am one of those people who can always be depended

upon. No, but a most charming French lady is coming, who will take you out, and sit with you whenever I am engaged elsewhere, you know; and as you speak French so well, you are certain to get on capitally. For my own sake I should have preferred a German. I speak German and French and Italian much about the same," said Augusta, truthfully. "But, however, thinking of you, I resolved to engage a French woman."

"To engage—do you mean I am to have a governess?" demanded Philippa, starting to her feet, indignantly.

"My dear Philippa," said Augusta, plaintively, "pray do not spring up like that, you quite startled me. Certainly not a governess—you forget I promised you should do no lessons while you were with me. Against my better judgment I own, but still to *me* a promise is a very sacred thing."

"But, Cousin Augusta, you said——"

"Holland, you are pulling my hair," said Augusta, "and by the by I wish you would tell Mrs. Joliffe that the room next to Miss Philippa's must be got ready for Mme. Minart. Or I could see her myself for one moment when I am dressed. Yes? Forgive me for interrupting you, Philippa. As I was saying, I have put off and put off getting a companion for myself, and now at last I have found a suitable person. These things take time and thought. She will write my notes, you

know, and do a hundred things besides. I am so terribly overworked. And it will be company for you in the evening."

Philippa made no answer. Her heart swelled with astonishment and resentment, but her pride prevented any utterance of the reproaches which rose to her lips.

She, who had moved heaven and earth, and sacrificed even her own mother to her devoted affection for her friend—for in this light did her desire to visit Augusta present itself to Philippa—to be calmly relegated to the society of a hired companion, while Cousin Augusta continued to pursue her frivolous course, without troubling to entertain the girl whom she had declared she looked upon as her own child.

Philippa realised with almost incredulous wrath that she had never in her life been treated with so little consideration. Her first impulse was to announce her intention of immediately returning home, or, as she put it to herself, of quitting Augusta's roof for ever. But an uncomfortable conviction, in the background of her thoughts, that such a course of action would be rather punishing herself than her inconsiderate friend caused her to hesitate; and while she hesitated Augusta calmly rippled on, assuring her of the benefits she would derive from Mme. Minart's companionship, and praising the qualities of this paragon, as revealed to her during an inter-

view of rather less than ten minutes' duration. Her enthusiastic remarks passed unheeded over Philippa's bent head, and caused Holland's lip to curl with contempt.

"We shall hear a different tale this time next year, and probably sooner," thought the maid to herself, for Lady Adelstane changed her domestics frequently, and they were all treasures when they first arrived, though they developed with strange unanimity into monsters before they were sent away.

"Perhaps, Philippa, dearest, you will go downstairs, and ring, and desire that Mrs. Joliffe should be sent up here to me at once," said Augusta, prudently ignoring the lowering expression of the handsome young face. "I shall certainly be late if I go on chattering like this, and when you are here I find myself talking all the time. It is such a pleasure to me, in my lonely life, to find a sympathetic listener. I don't know what I shall do when you are gone, darling."

"You will have Mme. Minart," said Philippa, unable to resist this curt expression of her resentment. "I will go and do what you ask, Cousin Augusta," and with the mien of an offended queen she marched out of the room.

"How ungrateful girls are!" complained Augusta, snatching this opportunity to improve the exquisite complexion which Nature had already bestowed upon her. "Naturally I only

engaged this person for Miss Philippa's sake, and for *yours*, Holland. You have been very good about it, but of course it's not your work to be always taking her about."

"It's very kind of you to think of me, my lady, I'm sure," said Holland, with a hint of satire in her tone; which plainly conveyed to her mistress that she was not impressed by this sudden display of consideration.

"Holland is a most unpleasant creature," reflected Augusta; "I shall certainly get rid of her before long. I hate a person with a nasty dry manner like hers. It's very unfortunate she should be such a good maid and such an industrious needlewoman. All good maids are disagreeable."

Augusta departed for her dinner-party in a less amiable frame of mind than usual; but the dinner proving unexceptionable and the company pleasant, she presently forgot her troubles, and recovered her customary good spirits, and satisfaction with herself and her surroundings.

Philippa maintained her attitude of proud composure throughout the solitary meal which was served to her in the great dining-room, where her cousin's tall and solemn servants punctiliously waited upon her.

But clear soup, roast quail, and iced asparagus could not assuage her wounded feelings, and

even the giant strawberries from Welwysbere were only enjoyed mechanically.

She was glad to find herself alone in the drawing-room upstairs, seated beside the open window in the pleasant summer twilight. Here she could look out into the Square and indulge her feelings unseen.

Her little cambric handkerchief was presently wet with tears, for her disappointment and grief, though childish, were very real.

She went over and over again, in memory, through the fond phrases and flattering assurances which Augusta had heaped upon her a few weeks since, in response to her own sincere admiration.

"If I had not thought she really loved me, and liked to talk to me—that she was really going to be, as she promised, my greatest friend in all the world," sobbed Philippa to herself, "I do not think that *only* the pleasure of coming to London and being fashionable and seeing things would have tempted me. I don't *think* so. Of course I know mamma believes it was only because I wanted gaiety and change and all that, but I know it wasn't—only I couldn't tell her how I long sometimes for a real companion and friend, to whom I could tell everything without getting everlasting good advice in return. Poor mamma, I don't mean that. Of course it's her duty to be always lecturing, and I know I'm careless, and all that."

Philippa was sobbing out her complaint half aloud in the darkness, but the room was empty and there was no one to hear.

"If I went home now, they would all *feel* 'I told you so,' though they wouldn't say it. I won't go home, I will see it through; only I can never, never feel the same to Augusta again. It is the climax. These long lonely evenings have been bad enough, but to have a stranger thrust upon me—I wish Cousin Cecil would come back. She pretends he is selfish, but I know better now. It is she who is selfish, and who doesn't speak the truth, and who—oh, to think I am saying such things about *her* of all people in the world!" and Philippa was obliged to admit to herself that her admiration of Augusta had declined almost as swiftly as it had arisen.

"But it is not *I* that am changeable, it is not, it is *not*," she thought miserably. "I could almost wish it were. It is she who is unworthy, and who has failed me; I won't show her my feelings, though." Here she was forced to swallow an uneasy suspicion that Augusta would not greatly mind if she did. "I will go through to the end. But all my pleasure in London is gone now; no matter where I go, or who I meet, I shall never, never be the same again."

CHAPTER XI

MRS. RALT, to the astonishment of her husband, now installed herself in one of the most luxurious hotels in London, and suddenly announced her intention of passing the remainder of the season there.

"But you hate London," said Mr. Ralt, as though afraid she must be mistaking her own wishes.

"So I do."

"You said you would never come up for the season again."

"So I did."

"And yet you have come."

"So I have," said Mrs. Ralt, and her small eyes twinkled merrily. "My dear old man, we must sometimes put ourselves about for other people. When I've taken a thing in hand I like to see it through, and in this case seeing it through means a short stay in the metropolis."

"I suppose you want to do a lot of shopping?"

"Not I," said Mrs. Ralt, "unless you want to see me a bit smarter, old man. I suppose I am a trifle dowdy. However, neither you nor

I ever set up for being beauties," she added, dispassionately.

But Mr. Ralt was apparently quite contented with his wife's appearance, for he protested fondly; though at the moment she was far from looking her best, being clad in a gentlemanly striped dressing-gown, with a small pigtail of iron-grey hair hanging down her shoulders, and a much larger one laid openly upon the dressing-table.

"I'm sure you always look very nice, Blanche. I don't know anybody who gets herself up in a more thoroughly sensible manner. And as for me, I ain't handsome and don't want to be; but I've got a good old-fashioned sporting kind of face," said Mr. Ralt, very simply. "What more can a man want? And I suppose you saw something in it, or you wouldn't have had me."

"To be sure I shouldn't," said Blanche.

Mr. Ralt waited for a moment in case his wife showed any inclination to explain herself further concerning her sudden determination to stay in London; but, as she did not, he shook his head with a puzzled expression and remarked,

"Well, I know you're always doing kindnesses to some one, Blanche."

"H'm, this may prove a very doubtful kindness," said Mrs Ralt grimly. "But meantime, Bob, as we are here, and as we mean to stop here, we may as well enjoy ourselves."

"By all means. I'll make out a regular pro-

gramme at once," said Mr. Ralt, with brightening eyes. "You know, Blanche, *I* like London well enough. It's *you* who don't like it."

"I hate smart clothes and I don't care much for smart people," said Mrs. Ralt, candidly. "Not that I've had much to do with either for the last twenty years. Papa was a great one for society and so on, but I leave all that to Augusta; it is more in her line than mine, though I have no doubt she makes a fine fool of herself. Her head is not one to stand being made a fuss of."

"I don't see why people should make less fuss of you than of Augusta," said Mr. Ralt, in offended accents. "You must not forget that if you *have* married a poor fellow who doesn't set up to be a swell, you are quite as well born as your sister."

"I am not likely to forget that," said Blanche, laughing heartily. "Something very odd indeed would have to happen before one twin sister could be less well born than the other! And as for my father, every one knows old Sam Mocha was a self-made man, who owed both his money and his peerage to his own exertions, and the more credit too. All nonsense about birth, dear old man. If the Bible's true we all came from Adam and Eve; and if it isn't, we all came from protoplasms"; in this airy manner did Mrs. Ralt sum up the history of human origin. "Which-

ever it is I cannot see that it gives us much occasion to boast. Now look here: I've got a nice little luncheon party for Sunday. George Chilcott and David Moore, and George's boy Hector, who's got an *exeat* or something. Anyway he's come up to see his father and uncle. And Augusta is going to bring Grace Trumoin and Philippa, and an odious Frenchwoman whom she's taken a violent fancy to; so we shall be quite a pleasant party. And as soon as you're dressed I want you to toddle round and secure a table at the Navarre."

"But why not ask them to dine?"

"You don't suppose I could get Augusta to dine under three weeks' notice! But I've booked some of the others for dinners and theatres," said Mrs. Ralt cheerfully. "Augusta rather likes lunching at restaurants, and she told me the Navarre had a new *chef*, which was a pretty broad hint. Meanwhile I'll leave you to take places somewhere for to-night and to-morrow for our two selves. Something light and bright in the musical comedy line, eh?"

"It's the only kind of show *I* have any use for," said Mr. Ralt, with much relief. "A man doesn't want to have to think, you know, after he's eaten a good dinner."

"No, no, nor a woman either," said Mrs. Ralt, "and we needn't be in town at all in the daytime—to speak of," she added, soothingly, "with the

little car always ready to nip off anywhere at a moment's notice."

"No more we need," said Mr. Ralt, and his rubicund face shone with satisfaction at the reminder.

At sixteen even despair is transitory, and three days after her melancholy disillusionment concerning Augusta's perfection, Philippa wrote to her mother as follows:

"My darling Mum,—The reason I have not written for so long is that I waited to be able to tell you about Mme. Minart, the companion whom Cousin Augusta has engaged to write her letters and do lots of other things; but while I am here she takes me for walks and has meals with me when Cousin Augusta is out.

"I would not write at once, as I know you think my judgments are apt to be hasty, but I can now tell you that Mme. Minart is by *far* the nicest person I have ever met. Of course it helps my French very much to be talking to her all day. Cousin Augusta likes her as much as I do, which is a great comfort. I know *now* what you mean by being tactful when I see Mme. Minart with Cousin Augusta. I assure you in three days I have learnt more tact from Mme. Minart than in all the rest of my life without her. Now, mamma, you used to say I ought to have a finishing gover-

ness, and of course I hated the idea; but if you could only persuade Cousin Augusta to let you have Mme. Minart for me, I should be simply delighted. She is thoroughly able to finish girls, for she lived with a Grand Duchess in Russia and finished all her girls; she told me so herself. This is quite my own idea about her coming to me, and to show you how discreet I am, *I have not told her* I am writing to ask you about this. She is very good-looking; I don't know if you would call her handsome. *I* do, but it is a face which grows upon one. At first sight I thought her almost plain. She is very dark, inclined to be yellow, and has a slight moustache; but even this is fascinating *when you know her well.* Cousin Augusta says she is sure she has Spanish blood. Her eyes are simply enormous, such *a dark brown* you can hardly tell the pupil from the iris, and her black hair comes down nearly to her knees, you never saw anything like it. Of course Cousin Augusta's maid is jealous of her, and poor Roper can't bear her, but you know how prejudiced servants are against foreigners. She is not young, she must be at least thirty, but quite well preserved and active, and it is a comfort to walk with some one who can walk as fast as I do. Holland has an absurd train and high heels which trip her up, and Roper gets so breathless that she bursts her dress, and even her boots, whereas Mme. Minart wears such neat shoes and

short, very smart skirts, and is so interested in everything one tells her that she is a delightful companion. To please you, mother darling, I am going to take more interest in my clothes, especially as I now have much prettier ones. To show you how delightful Mme. Minart must be, though I had been looking forward so to luncheon with Lady Kentisbury, I was actually quite sorry to leave her when the time came yesterday for me to go. Lady K. was very kind to me, and said I must call her Cousin Jane; and the others called me by my Christian name as we are cousins. Charlie is very fair and rather pretty, which must feel wretched for a boy. He looks no older than Hector, and is not half so broad though he is twenty-one, but he has very nice manners, almost like Cousin Cecil, and does not give himself airs because he happens to be a year or two older than oneself; so we got on very well, especially when Cousin Jane left us alone. I like him much better than Joanna, who is an affected pig; she is eighteen, and not so pretty as Charlie. To-morrow Charlie is going to take us all down to Ranelagh in his new motor. He is going to teach me to drive it, but don't be nervous, as Lady Kentisbury will be with us, and she is far more frightened about him than even you are about me. I am now enjoying myself very much, but I wish you would let me go to the Lundys' dance. Granny said I was to ask you again.

Their daughter is only seventeen, and it is only for boys and girls. Charlie and Joanna are going, and Joanna said with a horrid smile, 'Of course you can't go, as you're not out.' I am a head taller than she is and look years older. There is a horrid old Major Cymbert always coming here who once wanted to marry Cousin Augusta. He talks to me exactly as though I were a child. I must say it is very annoying. Mme. Minart has shown Roper a lovely way to do my hair; neither up nor down, but just right for a *jeune fille*. Please, please say yes about the dance. I'm afraid I wrote rather horridly about it the other day, but if you only could understand how hateful it is to be treated like a little girl when you're so nearly grown up you *would* let me go. Please write at once to say you will, dear mummie.

"Your affectionate daughter,

"PHILIPPA ADELSTANE."

This letter brought no particular consolation to Catherine, who lay awake at night, wondering what kind of woman this could be who in three days had obtained so much influence over her daughter. She penned a long, apologetic, anxious letter to Augusta on the subject, and the reply brought only partial satisfaction. Augusta wrote of course in a violent hurry. The words In Haste, might have been inscribed on her note-paper with her address, so invariably did they

recur in her communications to her relatives and friends. Like most persons who have nothing to do from morning till night, she never had a moment to spare. She assured Catherine of Mme. Minart's excellent qualities as an instructress and guardian of youth; and almost in one sentence added that she was a most trustworthy and devoted companion for Philippa, and that Philippa was scarcely ever with her, as nothing would induce Augusta to allow the girl out of her sight for a moment. Catherine was obliged to gather what comfort she might from these contradictory assurances.

Meanwhile the blank of Philippa's absence was perceptibly lessened by the companionship of little Lily. Catherine experienced occasionally a bewildered feeling that the child of her dreams had come to life, and felt almost jealous for Philippa's sake; almost resentful that the little arms which clung to her so faithfully were not Philippa's arms; yet realising that such demonstrative love was not in Philippa's nature.

Lily showed no preference for Miss Dulcinea, but followed her godmother about like a shadow.

In the morning, poor Catherine daily spent an anxious hour over her letter to Philippa; writing and rewriting; wording her news as carefully as though she were framing a diplomatic despatch, fearful of offending her child's susceptibilities by giving too much good advice,

and of neglecting her duty by withholding it altogether. During this long hour Lily sat like a mouse in a corner; poring over her lesson, and ready to repeat it perfectly the moment Cousin Catherine closed her envelope. Lily learnt to listen for the little sigh which heralded this moment, and it never failed to come.

In her heart she felt she knew why Catherine sighed, though she could not, perhaps, have put the feeling into words; but Catherine never guessed how intently the black eyes watched her as she bent over her little writing-table in the green-shaded parlour. When she rose, and went out into the kitchen garden, the little figure in a pink sunbonnet followed her there. Catherine cut lettuces and pulled spring onions, and gathered young spinach with her own hands; and Lily carried the basket, and helped to pick the green gooseberries and ripe strawberries, making grave comments which often obliged Catherine to laugh.

In the afternoon the child played mysterious games with fir-cones, under shrubbery bushes, talking to herself all the while; or if she were permitted buried herself in a story-book, and remained lost to earth until she was called to tea. In the evening she took the smallest watering-pot, and watered the geraniums and the ferns and the young lettuce as carefully as could be wished; and Catherine smiled to recall Philippa's early efforts in this direction: the trampled flower-beds,

the soaked shoes, and the dripping skirts which inevitably resulted.

Children have often far more delicacy of feeling than their elders give them credit for, and Lily preserved a large share of that natural reserve which is common in little maidens towards their elders; Catherine respected it, and never attempted to lift the veil of the child's silence concerning her home life. But she watched the little face grow daily brighter, the frightened twinkle develop into a frank smile, unafraid and unconcealed, and she perceived that this elfin furtive creature was in reality possessed of a merry soul, while the coaxing ways, which the Chilcotts called artful, only recalled to Catherine the affectionate warmth of heart and manner which had characterised Lily's mother. Though the child's caresses might sadden, yet in a manner they consoled Catherine for much that she had lost.

The love of Delia's child was precious to her, and she grew daily more interested in the training of a mind precociously intelligent; though its native sincerity had been, alas! warped by fear.

"Lily, things that aren't true have no real meaning. The world is full of tangles, and every time you tell a fib you add another little tangle, instead of helping the brave men and true who are striving all over the world to set things straight."

"Like sowing more little weeds in a garden," said Lily, sympathetically.

Catherine felt the surprised sense of being understood that often assailed her when she talked fancifully to Lily.

"I will help you pull up the little weeds, and you must start fresh and only let flowers grow in your little garden. When you have said something that is not quite true, stop and correct yourself," said Catherine encouragingly; "that will be pulling up the weed."

"Won't you be angry with me?"

"No, I shall know it is only a bad habit, and that you are trying hard to cure yourself."

Into this scheme for her own improvement Lily entered with much zest, and found it as good a game as any she had ever invented for herself.

Down the path of Fate now came stepping daintily, to meet George Chilcott, the languid, slender form of Lady Grace Trumoin.

David Moore was by no means sure that he approved of this result of his earnest counsel to his brother-in-law, or whether the calm and experienced woman of the world were altogether suited to be the successor of Delia. He had imagined a fresh young bride, who would brighten the dull existence of George, pet little Lily, and disperse the gloom which hung over Bridescombe.

Lady Grace was an unknown quantity. Nobody could foresee what she would choose to do, but it was very evident that she would do what she chose; and that George was attracted by the very elements of strength and reserve in her character which most repelled David. This David perceived a very few days after their arrival in town; but, however amenable George might be to his influence, there were limits to the advice which could be offered him; and his brother-in-law could only rejoice to perceive that Lily's father had shaken off his depression almost immediately after depositing his child in Catherine's care, and that every day spent in their bachelor rooms appeared to restore to him something of the careless jollity and placid good nature which had characterised his boyhood.

"It was time I had a change, David," he repeated more than once. "One begins to take a jaundiced view you know. Yes, that's it—a jaundiced view of one's surroundings, if one looks at them too closely for too long at a time."

Being of an optimistic and modest disposition, he even grew inclined to blame himself for the state of things which had arisen at Bridescombe, and which, as he frankly owned to David, made his life at times almost unbearable.

"I've no great gift for organisation, David, and I sometimes don't feel sure that going into the army is the best preparation for settling

down on one's own place, after all; and yet I can't help being glad Hector's set his heart on soldiering. Hope he'll pull off his exams. all right, but he ain't remarkable for brains, I'm afraid. I suppose I ought to hold forth to him about working and so forth, poor fellar, more than I do. But I ain't much of a disciplinarian."

"I don't believe jawing a boy does a bit of good," said David. "Let's have him here, give him the time of his life, and have one or two of the best to dine and do a play with us. Inspire him more than any preaching of yours or mine."

This form of discipline so recommended itself to young Hector, that he confided to Philippa at the Ralts' luncheon party that he wished his father would take up his abode permanently with Colonel Moore.

"He would be neglecting his duties at home," said Philippa, severely. "Oh, Hector, mamma has telegraphed that I may go to the Lundys' dance after all. Won't it be lovely? How I wish you were coming!"

"I'm jolly glad I'm not. I should hate it like anything," said the civil Hector. "Besides it's only for half-baked kids, not a real dance. I say, Phil, d'you think you'll be here for the Eton and Harrow?"

"I think so. I was to stay six weeks."

"That's all right. I shall see you there. Be

sure you're properly got up. You might wear the rig-out you've got on now. That hat is really frightfully decent. Very unlike the things you wear at Welwysbere. I suppose Lady Adelstane chose it."

"As if a boy of your age knew anything about hats. I chose it myself as it happens," said Philippa, disdainfully, and she turned her shoulder upon the youth.

"Don't get stuffy," he advised. "I shall be gone to-morrow, and then you'll be sorry. Who is the foreign lady? It makes everything stiff when people are obliged to jabber French."

"It is Mme. Minart, Cousin Augusta's companion," said Philippa eagerly.

"What does she want a companion for now she's got you?"

"Oh, Hector, she's such an angel!"

"Do you mean she's your latest craze?" said Hector, unimpressed.

"I don't know what you mean by my latest craze. She's my great friend. I only wish you had a tenth part of her tact," said Philippa with dignity.

"I only wish I had," said Hector, derisively. "If I could butter up old Slocum as she's buttering up Uncle David, it would be very greatly to my advantage."

"So Cinderella is to be allowed to go to the ball after all, eh, Philippa?" cried Mrs. Ralt.

"I wish you joy of your first dance, my dear. I wish you better luck than I had at mine, for I only got one partner; and I tripped him up, so down I came, and sprained my ankle and had to be carried home."

The noise of the band, the clatter of the service, and the chatter of the crowd in the restaurant rendered a *tête-à-tête* not only safe, but preferable to those who did not care to scream so loudly as Mrs. Ralt.

"I have really found a treasure," said Augusta to Lady Grace, next whom she had insisted upon seating herself. "Mme. Minart has been going through the accounts for me, and finds the household extravagance appalling. I have a very great mind to let her be housekeeper and get rid of Mrs. Joliffe. She was once housekeeper to a German baron and his wife, and is always pressing me to write to them about her."

"How delightful!" said Lady Grace, vaguely.

"She has taken Philippa completely off my hands. This afternoon, for instance, they are off to the Zoo together. Imagine my relief. My last Sunday afternoon was a perfect frost. Men can't and won't talk before a girl of that age. Nobody in fact can open their mouths. She feels it herself, poor darling, and it makes her more *farouche* than ever. You will say I ought to cure her, but really it's easier said than done."

"She looks happy enough now."

"I can't think why Blanche asked that boy," said Augusta, lowering her voice prudently, for George was seated next her on her other side. "Nor his father either. The very people whom Philippa meets every day at home."

Lady Grace knew very well why Mrs. Ralt had asked George Chilcott and his son, but she made no response to Augusta.

"Going to the Zoo!" cried Mr. Ralt. "What an excellent idea! Blanche, do you hear? Philippa and Mme. Minart are going to the Zoo. Let us make up a party and go all together."

"I can give you as many orders as you choose," said Augusta, making it clear that she had no intention of joining Mr. Ralt's party.

"To the Zoo! One would think we were a lot of kids!" said Hector, in an indignant aside to Philippa. But since his father and uncle did not share his prejudices against this childish form of amusement he was obliged to conceal his feelings, and consoled himself by the reflection that perhaps old Ralt would let him try his hand at driving the car.

"I tell you what, Augusta, when we call at your house for the tickets, you can let us have all the fruit you can spare for the animals," said Mrs. Ralt, cheerfully. "They will appreciate a change from nuts and buns."

"I never heard of anything so extravagant!" said Augusta, sincerely shocked.

"How wonderfully you speak English, madame," said Colonel Moore to his neighbour.

"I have lived many years in this country," said Mme. Minart's mellow contralto tones, modestly. "Not always in the same family—one does not improve so. One learns nothing. And besides, people grow tired of always the same governess—the same companion. I do not blame them. I feel the same. There are many," said Mme. Minart, with a twinkle in her dark eyes, "who would be glad to change their family—their relatives—from time to time—if they could."

"There certainly are. You are a student of human nature, I perceive," said David politely.

"It is necessary to study in order to please," she said, with a smile more melancholy than cheerful, and David's susceptible heart was instantly touched to compassion. "I have had to please people so different—of so many classes, even. I know your family of the suburb very well; of your country gentleman—that is again different; of the Anglo-Indian—altogether another; of the parsonage—the professional—the Londoner—of the great families who have many houses. The worldly, the pious, the vulgar, the simple, are to be found in each class. But always the higher you go, the more simple—the more courteous. Before you can be quite

simple—you must be very great—is it not so, monsieur?"

"It may very well be so," said David, laughing. "You have had more opportunities than I of knowing, I expect."

"Ah, that to me reveals you," she said archly. "The gentleman who makes no pretence." David's expressive face betrayed uneasiness, almost alarm, at this compliment; and she hastened to smooth it away. An inflection of pleading, of humility, crept into her voice. "I speak perhaps too plainly, but you will pardon me. For you seemed to me perhaps—not so English as——"

"I am half an Irishman," said David.

"I knew it," said Mme. Minart, and again her accent betrayed that subtle hint of flattery. But a moment later she was all attention to Augusta, who was begging Colonel Moore to escort her and Philippa to the Lundys' dance.

"But I don't know the Lundys."

"I assure you they are dying to know you. And they are going to send you a card to-morrow," said Augusta, determining to despatch a note to Lady Lundy and ask for this favour directly she returned home. "I am afraid Cecil won't be back. It is too provoking of him, for I wanted him to see Philippa at her first dance; but so it is. And I have only boys and girls coming to

dinner, and shall be quite too wretched without another old person to keep me in countenance," said Augusta, comfortably.

"I shall be delighted," said David.

Mme. Minart observed the frank flush of pleasure in Philippa's face, and the sparkle in her blue eye.

"She has everything in the world before her," thought the Frenchwoman. "Love, money, position all to come, and she has youth and beauty and a health that is perfect. She takes all good things as her due. What could I not have done, what could I not have been, with but half the chances of this child?"

Philippa's good spirits were now entirely restored. Though her cousin Augusta's friendship had failed her, yet that vacant place had been, as it seemed to her, miraculously filled up by this delightful Mme Minart, who was, after all, a far cleverer and more agreeable companion than Augusta could ever be. The flattery of the Frenchwoman had in fact sunk deeply into Philippa's soul, and soothed her wounded self-esteem completely.

She looked forward to her first dance without any regrets save one—that Mme Minart could not be present to behold her bliss. There was no doubt in Philippa's innocent mind but that such an occupation would afford her new friend the most exquisite pleasure. She was at this

period of her existence well aware that middle-aged persons find all their happiness in looking on at the happiness of the young, and are not so unreasonable as to expect enjoyment on their own account.

CHAPTER XII

TOWARDS the end of June, Cecil Adelstane rode up to Shepherd's Rest one evening; and meeting Johnny, the groom, in the lane, handed his horse over to be led to the stables, while he walked into the garden, where he found Catherine, as usual.

Her book had fallen into her lap, and she was enjoying the cool air after a very hot day.

Her dreaming gaze followed the flight of the swifts and house-martins wheeling and darting in the blue of space, in search of their invisible prey. All round the bench whereon she sat the campanulas, rose and purple and white, swung noiseless bells. Behind her the pointed spires of the fir-trees, and the rounded flowering masses of a great Spanish chestnut, were outlined against a clear sunset sky, and from the orchard, where the cows were being milked, came the sound of Lily's voice, gaily chattering. It struck Catherine that Cecil came up the garden path with a heavier air and step than usual.

"I have come to bid you good-bye, for my business is finished, and I am returning to town

to-morrow," he said, after his usual civil greeting and inquiries for her news of Philippa.

"It is the night of her dance," Catherine said, rather wistfully; but his absent expression made her abandon the subject. "I am afraid you have had a very dull time down here alone," she said.

"I have been too much occupied to be dull," said Sir Cecil in his most precise tones. He was silent for a moment, and then, as though suddenly conscious of her sympathetic feeling, was moved to make one of his rare confidences. "The fact is, Catherine, I have been very much worried, and troubled of late."

"I am sorry to hear it. I have fancied you were not looking well."

"All my life," said Sir Cecil gravely, "I have been constitutionally unable to stand worry. It affects my sleep. I fear for my health. I do indeed." He turned his deep blue eyes, that were the exact counterpart of Philippa's, upon Catherine, with an expression so woeful that she had some ado not to smile at his alarm for himself.

"You must not let yourself worry."

He shook his head.

"I am not inclined, I can assure you, to seek causes for anxiety. It has often been a matter of self-reproach with me that I have perhaps taken matters too easily; that I have been too—too—" He searched anxiously for words that

should convey his meaning without at the same time implying any possible reproach to another; and Catherine, who understood perfectly his loyalty to Augusta, felt tenderly towards him, and regretted her suppressed smile.

"I have been too much given to ignoring what I have not altogether felt able to approve."

"I do not think you need reproach yourself," said Catherine, gently.

"Do you not, indeed?" he said earnestly. "I am very glad to hear you say so, Catherine, very glad." He paused, and added emphatically, "I know no one whose opinion on such a matter I should value more than your own."

Catherine flushed with surprise and pleasure, for Cecil was not given to expressions of praise.

"To cut a long story short," he said, under the impression that he had been exceedingly loquacious, "I feel impelled to tell you, in the very strictest confidence, that I have discovered that my trusted agent here, Mr. Crewe, has been systematically defrauding me for a great number of years. Could you have conceived it possible?"

Catherine expressed her sympathy and indignation very warmly, but she found it difficult to appear surprised. Country neighbours are in the way of hearing a good many criticisms of absentee landlords, and the character of Mr. Crewe had not stood high in local estimation.

Fortunately Cecil was too much occupied

with his troubles to perceive her embarrassment.

"I have been obliged to send for my solicitor, Mr. Ash. He is a very clear-headed young man indeed. I thought it a great misfortune that his father, who had all our affairs at his fingers' ends, should be dead; but I am not sure whether old Ash had such energy as this young man has shown." He sighed wearily. "I blame myself, Catherine. I have been away too much, and too much taken up with—with gaiety and frivolity."

The words were so much at variance with his preternaturally solemn expression and the seriousness of his character, that again Catherine could have smiled, and again she restrained herself, noting the lines that unaccustomed care had engraven upon his handsome brow.

"I am sure, Cecil," she said, with an indignant inflection of voice, "that whatever you have done, or left undone, has been from no lack of conscientiousness. You have not been seeking your *own* pleasure." She could not help a slight emphasis.

"I have not indeed," he said, almost involuntarily, and sighed. "Do you remember, Catherine, how very much occupied I used to be with the estate when first I inherited? When we lived here practically all the year round? Those were happy years. I wish very much we had been able to continue living at the Abbey. I do not think Crewe would have had so many oppor-

tunities; but it is no use regretting what cannot be helped. I suppose few of us would not do differently in many ways, if we had our time to live over again. One must pay the penalty for—for the carelessness of one's youth."

Catherine knew that Cecil Adelstane was, in fact, paying the penalty for his choice of a silly and selfish wife, and for his weakness in allowing that wife to govern his actions; but she knew also that Augusta possessed a certain shrewdness in spite of her folly; which, combined as it was with want of principle and feeling, made it an easy matter for her to outwit her husband, who was quite as dull as he was conscientious.

"I hope the mischief done by Crewe is not irremediable, since you are able to go back to town," she said soothingly.

"His own attitude in the matter has been of the greatest assistance," replied Sir Cecil. "I must tell you, Catherine, that I owe my discovery of the whole affair to George Chilcott. He gave me a hint that he feared I was relying too much upon Crewe's integrity, and drew my attention to the fact that the felling of the timber last winter in the Amery and Woolaway woods had been excessive. Crewe had evidently counted on my neglecting to visit so outlying a portion of the property. I discovered that the woods had been practically destroyed, and that I

was actually being charged for the thinning of the coppices while he had been selling quantities of valuable and well-grown larch, and pocketing the proceeds. One discovery, of course, led to another, but I will not trouble you with the details. I have been grossly deceived and cheated through a long course of years, and my own neglect has been the contributory cause, leading him to become bolder and bolder as time went on, until he was utterly reckless, and believed he could do anything he chose with impunity."

"What will you do with him?"

"Why—I fear you may think me weak, but, since he threw himself on my mercy, I have decided not to prosecute. It is not altogether from motives of charity," said the scrupulous gentleman; "but I am anxious to avoid a publicity and scandal that would, in effect, be very mortifying. As regards the moral aspect of the case, those who have worked under Crewe, and who could not have been altogether ignorant of his untrustworthiness, are now aware that he has been dismissed in disgrace, and I do not think any further details need transpire, since he has rendered it unnecessary for us to call witnesses by confessing the whole of his misdeeds. He has speculated so wildly with the money of which he has defrauded me, that he has actually profited nothing. It appears to me there is nothing to be gained by punishing him further. He is an old

man—he will find no more employment—he is ruined. He served us well enough in the past, when my poor uncle was alive to look after him."

"I cannot help being glad he will not end his days in prison," said Catherine, apologetically.

"He is more likely to end them in the workhouse," said Cecil gloomily. "But it is not Crewe of whom I am thinking now, but of myself."

"Yes?"

"I have not troubled Augusta with the details of this painful affair. For one thing, she has not time to read letters, and for another it is too long to write about. I have merely told her that I am dissatisfied with Crewe, and consequently intending to dismiss him. But I must now break to her my further intention of taking up our residence at Welwysbere once more. I can no longer reconcile it with my conscience to neglect my obvious duty. With the assistance of young Ash and his accountant, and the valuable help afforded us by poor Crewe himself, during the past three weeks, I have pretty well come to a full understanding of the state of affairs, and I am determined to act upon that understanding. I am sure that Augusta will—nay, that she must—enter into my feelings."

Catherine felt equally sure she would not, and foresaw a deadlock; nor did Sir Cecil's careworn and anxious face express the hope and certainty that his words implied.

"You will now understand, my dear Catherine, why, after pressing you to entrust Philippa to our care, I have been unable to share Augusta's pleasure in her visit. But I am none the less grateful to you for sparing her to us, and I hope to be with her in London to-morrow. I wish you had been able to accompany her," said the innocent gentleman, who had no idea that Augusta had not included Catherine in her invitation. "But *you* are not to be tempted from your duty here."

"It is very hard to know where one's duty lies," said Catherine, with a smile and a sigh. "Perhaps I cling too much to my chosen occupations, and should rather be looking after my daughter."

"I am sure Augusta will take every care of her," he said, believing sincerely that he spoke truth. "You know that we look upon Philippa almost as our own child—and a child to be proud of—" he added, with a slight characteristic inclination of his head towards Catherine, as though he wished to intimate that he acknowledged her right to share in compliments regarding her offspring. "It is a great consolation to me, Catherine, that the next owner of Welwysbere should have had the inestimable benefit and advantage of your careful training. When I look around me here I never fail to recognise your—your positive genius for administrative order."

"I am afraid," said Catherine, smiling in spite of herself, "that Phil has not profited much by my training, such as it is."

"She is too young to show us yet what she can do. Your example will not be wasted upon her as she grows older," he said with conviction. "I was very much struck at Whitsuntide by the surprising extent of her knowledge of country affairs, and the—the—remarkable candour and courage with which she expressed her opinions."

"She does not lack candour or courage."

"Believe me, in the position Philippa will one day be called upon to occupy, those qualities are invaluable," said Sir Cecil, earnestly, and Catherine could not deny the truth of his contention.

"Poor Cecil! they say he is so like his uncle, when he is but the shadow of Philip," she thought, and realised more strongly than ever before that Sir Cecil's magnificent and striking appearance was but the disguise worn by a dull and feeble personality.

"And he looks such a very 'parfitte gentil Knight,'" she thought regretfully, looking up at the straight clear-cut profile.

She watched him as he rode slowly away, a fine horseman on a fine horse, sitting very square and erect in his saddle, with a carriage of the head and shoulders silhouetted against the sunset sky that made his likeness to her dead husband almost painfully exact.

He had declined Catherine's timid offer of supper, for it would not have occurred to Sir Cecil as possible that, having ordered his dinner to be served at half-past eight as usual, he should not return punctually to eat it; and in the midst of his heartfelt confidences to Catherine he did not forget to glance occasionally at his watch, and to inquire solicitously whether his late visit were not encroaching upon her valuable time. Thus she recollected afterwards that it was exactly half-past seven when Cecil Adelstane took leave of her, and rode away from Shepherd's Rest in the direction of his home.

CHAPTER XIII

PHILIPPA was of an age, and also of a disposition, to be more attracted by men of mature age than by boys, and she was very much piqued, upon arrival at the Lundys' party, that Colonel Moore did not immediately ask her to dance. Instead, he took up a position by Augusta's side, and remained there immovably; smiling at the boys and girls who were taking a more active part in the proceedings, but evincing no inclination to join them.

Philippa had divined that her adored Mme. Minart held the gallant colonel in very different estimation from the rest of the circle which at at present surrounded her young charge. Mme. Minart was perhaps not so much on her guard with Philippa as she would have been with a pupil less devoted to her; and she permitted herself to laugh quite openly at Augusta, thus destroying the last shred of Philippa's illusions regarding her cousin's perfection.

This ridicule was not altogether in accordance, however, with Philippa's taste, and she showed sufficient uneasiness and disapproval to keep

Mme. Minart's wit within bounds, which she might otherwise have exceeded, through the liveliness of her disposition, and the depths of her contempt for Lady Adelstane's understanding.

But although David Moore did not invite Philippa, nor any one else, to dance with him, but occupied himself incessantly in paying attention to the elder ladies present, he yet watched her with great interest, and agreed heartily with Augusta's whispered opinions that she was much the handsomest of all the youthful beauties there assembled.

Augusta had really bestowed some thought upon the selection of her young cousin's dress, which was at once to be suitable and becoming for a large dance, and yet to indicate that the wearer had not yet joined the ranks of the *débutantes*.

As Philippa's height and development, and the sculptural severity of her straight features, made her look some years older than she was, the desired effect could only be obtained by a school-girl *coiffure*, and accordingly her bright chestnut hair was combed loosely off her fair brow, and tied with an immense bow at the back of her neck, so that it hung in a single waving cluster of curls below her waist, and very hot and heavy she found it. She was much mortified by the necessity for thus advertising her youth, at the expense, as she considered,

of her appearance; and the youthful Lord Kentisbury sympathised warmly with her indignation, which she confided to him, for they were by this time on very friendly terms.

"Though you're quite wrong, you know, to think it isn't becoming," he hastened to assure her; "I bet you anything that any girl in the room would like to wear her hair like that—if she had hair like yours."

"Nonsense, it looks ridiculous," said Philippa, but she blushed with pleasure, for the language of compliment—from the lips of a young man—was new to her.

"But, of course, it's a beastly shame not to let you do it as you choose. Extraordinary thing, one's people never believe one knows what one likes best."

"And what suits one best," said Philippa, seriously; "though I am very grateful to Cousin Augusta for taking such pains to choose such a lovely dress for me, you know, Charlie."

"Of course," he said, gravely, and if the young man smiled inwardly at the ingenuousness and country simplicity which enabled Philippa thus to discuss her toilette with him, he did not like her any the less for such a display of confidence. In fact, to the delight and astonishment of his mother, the youthful marquis seemed inclined to fall in love with the very maiden she had selected for him (with the aid of Lady Sarah

and Augusta) as the most suitable bride in the world.

Excitement and pleasure had this evening bestowed upon Philippa all the animation which she usually lacked, and in her white and silver gown, which half revealed and half concealed the fair arms and fairer throat, her childish, noble beauty of form and feature shone conspicuously, even among so many pretty, well-dressed, well-bred, and well-drilled maidens.

"I had no idea she was half so good-looking," said Augusta contentedly; "she will be quite a beauty, you know, in a few years' time, and she has lost a great deal of her *gaucherie* already, in the short time she has been with me. You see what a difference it makes when a girl is properly dressed."

"I am going to make you angry," said David, "with my perversity in assuring you that I found her as handsome at Welwysbere in her blue frock and garden hat."

"Oh, that is all nonsense! Or if you did, no one else could. I will tell you a secret. We are all determined to marry her to the young man she is dancing with now."

A man of five-and-thirty is seldom pleased to hear that a beautiful girl is destined to be bestowed in marriage upon a youth of her own age.

"Fancy wasting her on a cub like that,"

David thought, with disgust. "That boy!" he said aloud, in sufficiently expressive accents.

"That boy, as you call him," said Augusta, somewhat nettled, "is——"

"Oh, I know who he is," said David, who was a trifle outspoken for the London fashionable world, where, to say the truth, he did not feel much at home. "It is young Kentisbury, and I have no doubt he would be considered a first-rate match. I know he is one of our biggest land-owners——"

"He is quite a charming young man—and a cousin of Cecil's," interrupted Augusta, rather coldly.

"A pity nature hasn't given him a better profile," retorted David; "a fellow with such an outline has no choice but to be a fool."

Augusta was inclined to be annoyed; but she reflected that Colonel Moore was a hero and somewhat of a lion, so that if his manners were rough he could be smiled upon indulgently all the same; because such want of polish was in keeping, as she considered, with the character.

"You are really incorrigible. And why are you not dancing? You have stuck by my side the whole evening," she reproached him, coquettishly.

"I don't know any of them. They belong to a different world," said David. "And all these strange dances are Greek to me, to tell you the

truth. A plain waltz or polka is all very well, but these mazurkas and reels and whatnots are out of my line."

"It is only for the boys and girls—who learn all sorts of wonderful dances nowadays," said Augusta. "I am told a children's party of to-day is a very pretty sight."

"Well this is a children's party, and I am sure it is a pretty sight."

"No, no, children's parties belong to the winter. This is a real boy and girl affair, and I am quite glad such dances have come into fashion again. It is as it should be. I have no patience with all these middle-aged married women prancing about," said Augusta, with an indignation not the less warm because her increasing *embonpoint* and breathlessness had long rendered such prancing quite impossible for her.

But her indignation was transitory, for Augusta was in high good humour. Everything was as it should be. Many of her best friends were present, and her hostess had found time to congratulate her warmly upon the beauty of her *débutante*.

The summer night was perfect, still and warm; so that the open windows, and the blocks of green transparent ice, overshadowed by roses and palms, which decorated every corner of the rooms were at once necessary and agreeable. The house was pleasantly cool without being draughty.

The courtyard, transformed into a tent, which was also a bower of blossom, was so perfectly arranged as to be quite as cool and comfortable as the house; and the supper here was everything Augusta could wish.

She enjoyed her prawns in aspic and stuffed quail, and Pêche Melba, in company with Major Cymbert, with whom she spent a very pleasant hour at a little table in a corner, while the conscientious Philippa searched in vain for her chaperon.

Philippa's conscientiousness was not the least part of her charm, and there was something piquant in the combination of so much primness with so much beauty, which atoned for her excessive dignity of bearing towards the young gentlemen who were her partners.

Young Lord Kentisbury, to be sure, was treated with especial confidence, but then he was a cousin, and an acquaintance of some days' standing. But even Charlie was not permitted to escort her round the illuminated garden, as he ardently proposed and desired.

Augusta had told Philippa that she was to return to her side after every dance, and that any other course of proceeding was not good form, and Philippa was quite determined that she would be good form. In matters where she was less well instructed, however, she displayed her natural independence of character very plainly;

and when her hostess led up to her a would-be partner whose appearance did not attract her, and who bashfully invited her to dance, the young lady said "No, thank you," without a moment's hesitation, and, with no idea of softening her blunt refusal by murmured excuses of previous engagements, she turned her back upon the astonished youth.

Colonel Moore was an amused spectator of this little incident, and, being of an unconventional and indeed somewhat over-candid disposition himself, was disposed rather to admire than to condemn the frankness of Philippa's behaviour. He stepped forward, invited her to go down to supper, and was flattered by the alacrity of her acceptance.

"I have been down three times already," she informed him, as he found her the strawberry ice she chose as her refreshment. "Boys are always wanting supper."

"Then I presume you have had something more substantial on one of the three occasons."

"No, I had a strawberry ice every time," said Philippa, calmly. "It seems to me stupid to waste time over eating and drinking when one is enjoying oneself."

"I am glad you are enjoying yourself."

She coloured.

"I should be enjoying myself more if I danced better. I dance badly," she said in mortified

tones. "Yet I had lessons when I was twelve. A man came all the way from Bath to teach me. But I have been obliged to sit out most of the dances—with my partners, of course," she added with dignity. "When they have sensible things like waltzes and polkas of course I can dance."

"That is just what I have been saying."

"It is different for you. You have been in deserts and places. No one expects *you* to care about such nonsense. But I ought to know all the things the other people of my age know," she said resentfully.

"But still you are enjoying yourself."

"Oh, yes, I have never enjoyed anything so much. It all looks like fairyland. The house is like an enchanted palace. I have never seen anything like it before. The girls wear such lovely frocks. I wish I knew them all. They all seem to know each other," she said wistfully, "but I scarcely know any one except Joanna, Charlie's horrid sister, whom I can't bear. But still it is delicious; and the roses are much more beautiful than any *we* ever grow."

He smiled.

"Does it not seem a pity to waste such perfect blooms on a single evening?"

Philippa considered the question seriously.

"No, I do not think it does," she remarked, practically. "Roses only last a very few days even if you don't cut them, and only a few people

see them in a garden. And if you *do* cut them, even with the greatest care, changing the water and clipping the stalks as mamma always does—they are never the same the day *after* they're gathered. What can it matter if they live only half the usual time, so long as they look pretty and please people?"

"There is a good deal in that," he said, laughing; and then he thought suddenly of Delia—with that contraction of the heart which accompanies a remembrance of the beloved dead in the midst of gaiety or rejoicing—Delia, who would be always young and beautiful in his memory and in the memory of all who loved her, because she too had lived only half the usual time, and had looked pretty and pleased people.

"Do you go to a great many parties?" said Philippa's voice, breaking in upon his reflections.

"I have been to one or two. Now I have come to live in London, I suppose I must do as others do, more or less."

"Don't you like living in London?"

"I like my work, now I'm beginning to get into it; but of course working in an office all day, when one is used to an outdoor life, is a bit irksome," said David, rather surprised to find himself talking almost confidentially to this mere child, as he told himself she was; but the deep blue, long-lashed eyes were fixed with sincere

interest upon him, and a child who is sympathetic and who believes in the speaker is a good listener.

Philippa criticised Catherine; secretly believing herself wiser than her mother, and indeed than any of her relatives; as the majority of young people, secretly or openly, always have been accustomed to consider themselves wiser than their parents and guardians. But she did not criticise David Moore, and was, on the contrary, exceedingly flattered that he should talk to her thus, and pleased to observe that young Kentisbury hovered round uneasily, not daring to interrupt, nor to claim his partner for the dance that was lawfully his own. For, though he might be one of the largest land-owners in Great Britain, and the head of a noble house, he was also a subaltern in the Guards, and entertained a very wholesome respect for his distinguished senior.

"What *is* your work, Cousin David?"

"Sitting in a very small room and writing endless letters," he said smiling.

"Why do they want a soldier to do that?"

"Because the letters have to do with military subjects."

"I see, and they want some one with practical experience," said Philippa, nodding. "That seems sensible. But when will you go back to fighting?"

"Why, in the next war, I hope!" he said, laughing. "But in the ordinary course I shall go back to soldiering in about three years, I expect. All depends upon how I get on, you know."

"I would rather do active work than writing, but of course one ought to try all kinds of life," said Philippa, very calmly.

"Do you want to try all kinds of life?" he said, half jesting and half earnestly.

"I intend to," she said, very seriously. "So far as a girl can, you know. Of course one cannot do all one wishes, like a man. But I would like to see a great many people, and visit a great many countries, before I settled down in my own home for good."

"Would it not make home seem dull afterwards?"

"No," said Philippa, surprised; "when one has seen everything one is content to settle down; not when one has seen nobody and been nowhere. Unless indeed," she added thoughtfully, "one has a very vivid imagination and is very fond of books, like mamma. She is quite contented to read about things and says it's the same as seeing them. It's not the same to me."

"Nor to me," said David, simply, "though I'm fond enough of reading."

"But you will settle down some day."

"Shall I?" said David. "Well, I suppose so";

he shrugged his shoulders. "Most men dream of settling down some day, but I should like to cling on a little longer before I indulge in such dreams."

"When will they make you a K.C.B.?"

"Probably never," but he smiled.

"They are sure to in the end," she said confidently. "If I were a man I should be prouder of the honours I had earned than of the honours I inherited."

"So would I, in a way—though, in my case, there's no one in particular left to care whether I get any or not, which does away with pride altogether."

"Why—we're all proud of you," cried Philippa, indignantly, "but I *would* like you to get a K.C.B.," she added, and then blushed at her own enthusiasm. The warm flush softened her severe young beauty into a loveliness that must have appealed to a harder heart than David's, who could not be insensible to such innocent flattery.

"Then I must do my best to win my spurs—when so fair a princess bids me," he said, laughing and colouring; but he drew the slender hand through his arm rather tenderly, as he led Philippa upstairs.

After this interlude he was conscious of a slight change in the sentiments with which he regarded the tall, youthful vestal in white and silver, who but a few moments since had been to

him only Catherine's child. He realised that Philippa had entered upon her inheritance of womanhood, and had a very distinct personality and will and wishes of her own.

"And Catherine said she was a baby," he reflected, and laughed slightly to himself, forgetting that the side of her character which Philippa had shown him was different indeed from that which she exhibited towards her mother.

There was another person whose first careless sentiments of admiration and liking were changing towards Philippa Adelstane; but as young Lord Kentisbury was some fifteen years younger than David Moore, this change was proportionately swifter; and his boyish compliments became open declarations of love before the close of that memorable dance.

Philippa drove home with her *chaperon* through the grey dawn of the streets, too much excited to perceive the odd appearance which Augusta's complexion presented in the unkind light of the morning.

Charlie's protestations rang in her ears, only to be dismissed with scorn as boyish nonsense at one moment, and recalled at the next as sweetest food for maiden vanity.

Other words had made a deeper impression upon her than the babble of young Kentisbury.

"He said—he said he would do his best to win his spurs"—thought Philippa, with burning cheeks

and beating heart, "as though he had not won them a thousand times over if there were any justice in this world."

Catherine had acquired the habit of sitting up late and reading, in the hope that she might thus be able to court sleep the more easily when she at last retired to rest. Miss Dulcinea kept early hours, and as she led an active outdoor life, and was possessed of a peculiarly peaceful temperament, she found no difficulty in obtaining nine or ten hours sleep out of the twenty-four. But with the departure of Philippa, the demon worry had taken possession of poor Catherine's pillow; presenting to her tormented imagination a thousand vivid pictures of her child in danger and difficulty, so that she sometimes started up with the cold dews of anguish and terror breaking forth on her brow; ready to dash off, as it were, into the darkness of the night, and rescue her darling from she knew not what. It was the thought of Philippa's own vexation at such an exhibition of maternal over-fondness that alone restrained her from actually putting into practice in the daytime the plans she evolved in the silence of the night, for travelling up to town, and seeing for herself how her child was faring at the hands of Augusta.

In the daylight she could view the matter more calmly, put a curb upon her nervous fancy, and dwell with pleasure on the thought that in a

few weeks Philippa must be restored to her. But in the dark, philosophy failed; she tossed sleepless until the dawn brought its own strange soothing, and the gleam of a new day breaking over the spires of the larches somehow calmed her troubled spirit, so that she would be sleeping heavily at the hour when she was accustomed to rise.

She had discovered, or fancied, that the demon was in part exorcised by a few moments spent in the silent immensity of the night outside her cottage, before she went up to her own room; and on the night of Cecil's visit she closed her book a little before twelve o'clock, and stole out into the garden, opening the door very softly that the sleeping household might not be disturbed. Here she was able to forget that Philippa was at the present moment very probably over-heating or over-tiring herself in a London ballroom; she forgot to wonder concerning her child's health or her appearance, or the measure of her filial affection; and stood, with hushed breath and tranquil spirit, gazing across the quiet enclosure of her own beloved domain—so unfamiliar and ghostlike in the light of a pale moon, obscured by scudding clouds—to the valley below, half veiled in a faint silver mist, whence emerged the dark outline of the square church tower which marked Philip Adelstane's resting-place. She looked upwards to the innumerable glittering worlds of the silent unfathomable universe; and

as she looked her cares, her troubles, and her anxieties appeared small and transient, even to vanishing point.

Then a sound recalled them, and her musing spirit returned, hurried and alarmed, to earth and the life of every day.

There was the gleam of a lantern through the hedge; the sound, unusual at this hour, of a man's step in the lane beyond her garden gate.

"What is it? I am here," she called, with that sudden leap of the heart too familiar to one whose days and nights are shadowed with that nameless apprehension of motherhood.

At the gate the man lifted his lantern, and slackened his pace coming up the path, as though to get breath for his intended communication, and Catherine suddenly sighed with relief to perceive he was not from the post-office.

It could not then be a telegram concerning Philippa; her fears lessened, and she stood awaiting him in the open doorway, which threw a square illumination on the gravel path and lawn; in which he presently stood, and revealed himself as a groom from the Abbey.

"I beg your pardon, my lady," he panted, "they sent me up—I said I cude run in the time it wude take tu get back tu stable and saddle a harse. 'Tis a dreadful accident, my lady, has happened tu Sir Cecil."

"An accident!"

"Oh, my lady, I don't know how tu tell on't. I be arl shaking myself," said the man, with a sob of agitation. "Him didn't come home tu's dinner as usual, and us was surprised, vor yu know how punctual he du be. But us didn't know where he was and thart he'd been detained like. And about an hour ago some one brart word his harse had been seen grazing down tu Aplin's vield, wi' his bridle broke. Us arl started out then in a fright tu luke vor'm; and vound 'un, my lady—now doantee be opset like," said the man in a pleading voice of subdued grief and excitement; "we'm vound 'un tu the bottom of the lane here, at the turning arf the high road. There be the mark where the harse putt un's fute tu a hole and fell, where zum vule had hitched out a big stone to stiddy a waggon, very like; and us thinks the master's head must have struck the stone in farling, my lady; vor 'tis clear he never muved no mar, and the doctor says as the life has been out of him vor hours."

Catherine was too much stunned to speak. *The life had been out of him for hours*, and that evening he had bidden her farewell, with a smile on his handsome lips; and ridden away, in the very prime and glory of his manhood, full of thought and hope and planning for the morrow—who now lay low in the silence of death.

CHAPTER XIV

A MESSENGER with a letter was despatched by the one o'clock train from Ilverton, which was due to arrive in London in the early morning; and Catherine, to whom all arrangements were of necessity referred, thus broke the terrible news of Sir Cecil's fatal accident as tenderly as possible to Augusta, and added a request that a message might be sent at once to old Lady Sarah's faithful maid, who would best know how to prepare her aged mistress for the shock that awaited her.

Through the long and dreary morning which succeeded the catastrophe, she waited anxiously for a telegram from Augusta, making no doubt that she and Philippa would come home by the first possible train. But the day was well advanced before the telegram arrived, and the contents were not at all what Catherine expected.

"Absolutely prostrate and helpless. Please come here at once and without delay. Urgent.—AUGUSTA."

"She ought to come home. How can she leave *him* lying there alone, and not come?" said Catherine, shedding indignant tears. "What can I do?

It is not as if I had ever been anything to Augusta, or she to me."

"Oh, my dear, my dear, you are kind and gentle; and she is a very helpless person, as she truly says. I am sure I should want you if I were in such a trouble as hers," sobbed Miss Dulcinea, who had been completely overcome by the news which greeted her on waking.

"Of course I must go if she wants me," Catherine said, almost angrily, "but it will only be to bring her back; and if she wanted me without delay, why *did* she delay so that I can only go by the slow afternoon train, which does not get there until past nine o'clock at night?"

But there was a gleam of comfort in her sorrow at the thought that her child must now be restored to her arms.

"And I shall never let her go again—to suffer as I have suffered," thought Catherine, "after this terrible lesson of the uncertainty of life."

She wept as she packed a very few things in a small hand-case and dressing-bag, resolved that no entreaties of Augusta should detain her or Philippa in London.

"It is Cecil, poor, poor Cecil, to whom we owe all the duty and affection and respect which we shall ever be able to show him now," she sobbed. "What is Augusta to us?—cold and selfish, thinking only of her own health and comfort while *he* lies dead in his own house—the last of his race,

except my darling!" Then she sank back in her chair, appalled by the recollection that the heavy burden of responsibility which had fallen from the dead man's shoulders would now devolve upon her child.

It was Philippa who was the last of the Adelstanes—whose inheritance had thus, with terrible suddenness, come upon her—and Catherine's heart sank as she thought of the changes awaiting her.

Strive as she would to put all such thoughts aside, they returned upon her again and again while she made ready for her solitary journey.

"Take me with you," implored Lily, clinging about her with passionate tears and distressing persistence.

"I cannot, Lily, but I will come back to-morrow. Yes, I promise," said Catherine, strengthening her own resolution by thus giving her word to the child. "You will take care of Aunt Dulcinea and of everything for me?"

"You must not be troublesome," said Aunt Dulcinea, admonishing her very kindly; but she shook her head over the selfishness of Lily, though she had always found a thousand excuses for the selfishness of Philippa.

"Aunt Clara will come and fetch me when you are gone," said Lily, bursting into fresh tears.

"I wouldn't let you go," said Aunt Dulcinea, and her soft heart melted.

"I shall be back before they know I am gone," said Catherine soothingly.

"Granny knows everything, and Aunt Dulcinea is frightened of Granny—you know she is," said Lily. "But if you will forbid me to go, I can tell them so when they come for me."

"There, there, I forbid you," said Catherine, and she fondled the little fragile creature who clung to her so faithfully.

Exhausted by grief, wakefulness, and excitement, Catherine fell asleep in the train as daylight waned, and was astonished when she woke, somewhat chilled and stiff, to find herself at her journey's end.

By the time her cab drew up at the house in Belgrave Square she had realised afresh all that had happened, and the tears started again to her eyes at the sight of the old butler's familiar face at the front door. She greeted him kindly, for his own distress was very obvious.

"Is Lady Adelstane able to see me at once? And where is Miss Philippa? Is she sitting up for me? I should like to go first to her," she said, wringing the old man's hand, which he put out to her trembling, as though he scarce knew what he did.

"Oh, ma'am—oh, my lady!" said Pilkington.

"Do not—do not—I know it is terrible—but indeed we must not give way," said Catherine with a sob in her throat.

"We wasn't sure—we didn't send to meet you—my lady, but—you came by the four o'clock train?" he faltered.

"Yes," she said, surprised.

"And there was no—you did not get the second telegram? I am afraid it was sent off too late. But her ladyship was that distracted—she didn't well know what she was doing."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, my lady, come in! You mustn't stand here—what am I thinking of? Come in—come in," said Pilkington. "Her ladyship's upstairs, most out of her mind, and here's dinner ready for you in the dining-room."

Catherine followed him, almost wondering to see the steady and self-possessed Pilkington thus utterly unstrung.

"What second telegram?" she repeated as he closed the dining-room door upon the little commotion in the hall—the footmen carrying in her modest luggage and paying the cabman.

The old man looked at her with an expression so imploring as to be almost wild.

"To ask you—whether—to ask you if—Miss Philippa had gone back to Welwysbere—to you, my lady?" he cried, putting his shaking hands together. "For she's not been seen here since she came home from the dance at three o'clock in the morning."

Catherine knew not what she said nor what

she looked, and was not conscious how she got out of the room or upstairs; but the echo of Pilkington's words had not died from her ears before she found herself holding Augusta's shoulder in the drawing-room, almost shaking her—hoarsely asking her over and over again what she had done with her child. She was in truth for a few moments like a mad woman, knowing not what she said nor what Augusta answered. The pent-up thoughts, suppressed anxiety, and hidden jealous resentment of weeks found words and poured themselves forth, but so incoherently as merely to frighten Augusta without reaching her understanding. All she knew and felt was that Catherine was like one possessed and insane with blind fury, and that such behaviour towards a woman just bereaved of her husband was an outrage. She screamed with terror and indignation, and it was Mme. Minart who flew to her assistance and who put Catherine into a chair by the open window with a mixture of authority and soothing, and forced her presently to swallow a glass of wine.

"Who are you?" Catherine faltered, regaining some measure of her self-command.

"I am nobody—nothing," said Mme. Minart in her impatient tones of suppressed force. She fixed her great dark eyes upon Catherine's white face with some compassion. "Be calm. Of what use this agony, this emotion? It is not thus you can help yourself or others."

Catherine gave her a strange wild look.

"I know now who you are. You are right—I must be calm. I must think—and act." She put her hands to her hair, smoothed it, and rose from the arm-chair, refreshed physically by the wine and mentally by the Frenchwoman's reproaches.

"I beg your pardon, Augusta," said Catherine, and her voice grew almost steady. "Now tell me quickly and plainly what has happened, and what you have done with Philippa."

Augusta, fat and helpless, reclining on a Louis Seize couch among embroidered cushions, and clothed in flowing lace draperies, was in very poor case to speak quickly or plainly.

"Everything has happened," she wailed—"everything at once. It is appalling! I sent for you—what more could I do? I am sure you cannot reproach me more than I reproach myself for ever undertaking the charge of another person's child. But *he* wished it. I can't realise what has happened. I am like a person in a dream. Oh, Catherine! he can't really be dead—all in a moment like that"—her voice rose to a scream—"and you to come and reproach me!"

She hid her face in her lace handkerchief, really unable to continue, and Catherine wrung her hands in distress and impatience.

"Where is Roper? I trusted my child to her," she said, turning to the door.

"Roper knows nothing. I will tell you, since Miladi cannot," said Mme. Minart. "Miladi took your daughter to a ball last night, and returned about three in the morning. Philippa came to my room to tell me of her enjoyment, and I told her that in the morning she must sleep late after a fatigue so great. Also I unfastened her dress, for she had forbid Roper, who is old, to sit up for her; and she knew that to me it is nothing to be disturbed. At seven this morning I rise and go to seek Roper, that she may not disturb the child; and I meet her on the stairs, crying, for she has seen the servant who brought the letter from Devonshire for Miladi, and he has told her of the terrible news. I still forbid that the child should be waked to hear this."

Catherine put out her hand impulsively, as though to thank Mme. Minart for this thought of Philippa, but the Frenchwoman did not pause in her rapid low-toned recital.

"I say to Roper, 'Let her sleep as long as she will; it will be time enough that she should know. What can she do?' And Roper agree, but say I am not to tell her, she will tell herself. What would you? The vulgar find a certain joy even in the telling of bad news," said Mme. Minart disdainfully. "I say I will certainly not tell her, and I go to seek the maid of Miladi. She too says Miladi will know soon enough, and will let her sleep on, and give the letter only when

she wakes, since there is nothing—no more to be done for the poor gentleman. And since Miladi is" —there was an inflection of satire in Mme. Minart's tones—"so weak, so delicate, that she will need all her strength in a grief so terrible. At nine o'clock Holland dares no longer wait, and she goes to Miladi, who has, as was to be expected, an attack of the nerves."

"Of the heart," supplemented Augusta with a sob.

"Of the heart." Mme. Minart accepted the correction without a change of expression. "And Holland is obliged to call for assistance. I go, and Roper, and others. There is a great confusion. When Roper goes upstairs to her young lady she finds that she has already risen and left her room. She looks for her downstairs in the room where we breakfast, and finds her not, and someone says she is with Miladi. Later we find that she is not with Miladi, and that Miladi has not seen her. We search here and there; no one has seen her, no one has told her the news. That is all," said Mme. Minart.

"What did you do?"

"What could we do," said Augusta, weeping, "but wait for her to come back, or let us know where she had gone? I made up my mind she had heard the news somehow and raced off to you —it would be just like her, so headstrong—and without a word to anybody. It never occurred

to me to telegraph and ask you. I waited to hear from *you*. And then it turned out that nobody could have told her, since nobody had seen her, so I grew frightened and telegraphed to you. It was Pilkington who made me wire a second time, for he had wired privately himself meantime to the station-master at Ilverton and learnt that she had not arrived there." As she spoke the butler brought a telegram into the room, and waited, breathless with anxiety, while Catherine tore it open, heedless to whom it might be addressed.

It was from Miss Dulcinea.

"Philippa has not come home. Are we to expect her? Cannot understand your wire."

"I took the liberty of telegraphing myself to Mrs. Jones at the Abbey," said Pilkington in subdued tones to Catherine. "Miss Philippa has not arrived there, my lady. I put it very guarded, not to rouse any talk like. I think, my lady, no more time ought to be lost, if you'll excuse me."

"Of course no more time ought to be lost," said Catherine, trembling. "Where is Colonel Moore? Have you sent to him, or to Mr. Chilcott? And Lady Sarah?"

"I sent round to her ladyship's house the first thing this morning. Miss Philippa has not been to Curzon Street, my lady. And Colonel Moore and Squire Chilcott is out of town, just left to spend the week-end at Ralt."

"Yes, yes! Colonel Moore said last night that they were going—and Grace Trumoin too. So like Blanche, luring all my friends away from me!" sobbed Augusta.

"Saturday's a awkward day for everything, my lady," said Pilkington, "but I don't think we ought to lose a moment, now you've come, in going to Scotland Yard. They'll telegraph her description all down the line to Devonshire and all over the country. It's the best thing we can do."

"Yes, yes, we can do that. It is something," said Catherine, "and I will telegraph to Ralt; they will come back when they hear. Come at once, Pilkington."

"Catherine, you must rest—you must eat something, or you will be ill yourself," cried Augusta. "*I* am as ill as I can be. I feel as if I should go out of my mind with all this on the top of what has happened."

"'Do you think I shall ever rest again, day or night," said Catherine fiercely, "until I know my child is safe? Come, Pilkington, we will take Roper with us, and I can question her as we go." And she went away without another word or look to spare for the weeping new-made widow.

CHAPTER XV

"WHAT am I to do? I determined I would come and ask you—for Catherine will not pay the least heed to what I say. I do not think she even hears me. She never went to bed at all last night. She will be out of her mind if this goes on."

"And no wonder," said Lady Sarah grimly.

"Of course I'm not fit to come and see you. No one could expect it of me," sobbed Augusta. "It's not decent that I should come even here, but at your age I did not feel justified in asking you to come to me. Of course, if this—this extraordinary complication had not happened, I should have gone down at once—*at once* to the Abbey, able or not able, as every one would have expected of me. As it is I am stunned, simply stunned, as any one would be (and every one knows what we were to each other). But here am I, a widow only a day old, and nobody thinking about me or my feeling at all. Mr. Ash writing for instructions, when I don't know what ought to be done under the circumstances—and if Philippa doesn't appear at—at the—oh, how can I say the word?" faltered Augusta, with a fresh

burst of tears—"what will people say? Oh, it is dreadful to have no one—no one to take the responsibility off my hands!"

"Mr. Ash can settle all details about the funeral," said Lady Sarah, without faltering at all.

There were no traces of tears about her shrunken yet handsome old face, but the waxen purity of her complexion was paler, and there was a curious ashen greyness about her sunken mouth and fine-cut nostrils that told of the shock she had suffered. Grief is often softened mysteriously to the very old, who have outlived the loss of many loved ones and have grown almost accustomed to the chill visitations of Death stealing about them on all sides, and leaving them at last alone in a world full of strangers and memories.

Lady Sarah's sardonic humour had not deserted her; she showed little more sympathy than usual with her granddaughter-in-law, and would have died rather than relax her own self-control in Augusta's presence.

"Mr. Ash is quite a young man; he must have some one to direct him. I couldn't think of leaving it to him. And here is George Chilcott, poor Cecil's oldest friend and neighbour, shocked as he is—as he must be—yet he can give his attention to nothing but this dreadful business of Philippa; and Colonel Moore is the same. They came down with Blanche and Bob from

Ralt this morning. And the police in and out of the house; even I am being questioned and cross-examined as though I were a convict. Catherine seems to suspect every one in turn of having made away with her daughter, especially Mme. Minart."

"Pray, who is Mme. Minart?"

"My companion, who——"

"Dear me! And since when have you found it necessary to start a companion?" said Lady Sarah, raising her eyebrows in affected surprise.

"Oh, grandmamma! you must remember I told you a fortnight ago she was coming; and here she was so attached to Philippa, poor thing, following her about from morning till night, and never letting her out of her sight. No one can say I was not careful of Philippa. I was afraid of leaving her even with her own maid."

"It appears to me that she was rather Philippa's companion than yours."

"In a sense she was; and that is what makes it so ridiculous to suspect her. She is absolutely devoted to Philippa, and how could she have hidden her away against her will? The thing is absurd. The fact is Catherine has spoilt her daughter so, that Philippa has just taken it into her head to be off no one knows where, and then they all come down upon me. One would think they would have respected my first day of widowhood."

"You are responsible for Philippa," said Lady Sarah in cutting tones. "She cannot have vanished into thin air. She must have gone somewhere out of your house, and they must look for the clue of her disappearance there."

"But I know no more than the babe unborn where she went," wailed Augusta. "All I can say is that she enjoyed herself at the dance, and young Kentisbury paid her a great deal of attention. It was my suggestion to send round to their house and tell them in confidence."

"He is the last person who ought to have heard anything about it," said Lady Sarah sharply. "It may be nothing but a childish freak. She will probably turn up to-morrow, and then he need never have known. A girl's reputation is a brittle thing; you should have had more sense."

Poor Augusta looked helplessly at her grandmother-in-law.

"What is the use of trying to hush it up when it is sure to get into the papers?" she said tearfully. "And Charlie is almost frantic. He says he will never rest day or night till he has found her. The Scotland Yard people thought it must be an elopement at first; but now they understand who she is and all about her, they think it is more likely a blackmailing business, and that she has been abducted against her will. But who could have abducted a strong powerful girl like Philippa

against her will? The whole thing is a complete mystery."

"Why has Catherine not been here?" said Lady Sarah. "Send her to me."

"She was out all night with Roper and Pilkington. *He* is quite knocked up to-day. But Catherine is as strong as a horse; she always was," said Augusta resentfully. "And all to-day she has been with this Detective Mills, questioning and cross-questioning every servant in my house, as I tell you; and bullying me about Mme. Minart's references, and Philippa's fondness for her, and her being left alone with her every evening, and taking meals with her. One would think the girl had been utterly neglected. But I have told Catherine once for all she is welcome to take charge of my house and every one in it —indeed she has practically done so without making any bones about it. But, Philippa or no Philippa, I go down to Welwysbere to-morrow, and would to-day only the Sunday trains are so impossible; and I came to tell you, so that every one should know I have your approval. I suppose you can't disapprove of my wishing to go to—to my poor—oh dear, oh dear!"

"The sooner you go the better," said Lady Sarah.

"I knew you would think so," said Augusta, and she rose with some alacrity and tottered to Lady Sarah's side to take her leave.

"Let me know the instant you get news."

"I will—I will. I'll come round myself before I start to-morrow to bid you good-bye—if I live," sobbed Augusta piously.

"I shall not expect you otherwise," said Lady Sarah, and she proffered a cold cheek to Augusta's tearful kiss.

"How profane grandmamma is even at a time like this!" murmured poor Lady Adelstane as she groped her way down the narrow staircase of the little house in Curzon Street.

"Augusta's grief seems to have settled in her legs," said Lady Sarah, viewing in a dispassionate manner from the drawing-room window Augusta's departure and the tender respect with which she was assisted into the carriage by her colossal footman. "She appears unable to walk without help."

"I wish you would come and lie down and rest yourself, my lady," said Tailer very anxiously; for, though she was pretty well accustomed to Lady Sarah's ways, yet she thought her composure under the double catastrophe unnatural. "Let me bring you some tea. A visit like that is enough to upset your ladyship's heart, and a cup of tea would do you good, my lady."

"A cup of tea is all you would require to console you for *my* demise, Tailer, I am well aware," said Lady Sarah sardonically. "And I may take this opportunity of warning you that the less

you say about me over it the better. For if I hear you telling people that you were my confidential friend, or any nonsense of that kind, you may depend upon it I shall haunt you in the most unpleasant manner."

"Oh, my lady, what dreadful things you do say! You make my blood run cold," said Tailer, horrified, and perhaps also a little conscience-stricken.

"Leave the door open and the lamp burning all night in the cottage, and do not stir from the house for a moment. Oh, if she should come home and find nobody waiting to welcome her!" wrote Catherine in a hurried tremulous scrawl which poor Miss Dulcinea, blind with tears, could hardly read. "There has been a clue. They have found a policeman who saw a tall girl in a blue dress and black hat walking in Belgrave Square at about nine o'clock on Saturday morning. He remembers her because he thought of warning her not to carry her purse so openly in her hand; but, seeing she looked very strong and determined and well able to take care of herself, he said nothing after all. There is no doubt it was my darling, for her plain blue serge dress and her black hat are missing from her wardrobe. She carried no bag nor parcel, he is quite certain of that; so, wherever she went, there could have been nothing premeditated. She did not look

agitated nor upset in the least, so she cannot have heard the dreadful news of poor Cecil's death. He says he is certain he would have observed anything unusual about her, because he took particular notice of her being such a fine healthy upright young lady; but though she passed close to him he had nothing to say of her beauty, nor did he remember the colour of her hair. Where she was going we cannot tell. Oh, dear Aunt Dulcinea, you can do nothing but pray for her and watch for her, and as you love me, never leave the cottage day or night lest she should come."

"David, *that woman knows.*"

"What woman?"

"Mme. Minart."

"What makes you think so?"

"That is just it. I have no reason that I can ask you or George or any one else to listen to," said Catherine almost wildly. "You can call it instinct if you like—a woman's instinct—or a mother's. But directly she touched me, I *knew*, when she put me into the chair by the window last night and I felt her strong hands and saw her dark clever face bending over me, and looking sorry—sorry for me—clever people can't help being sorry for their victims, you know; it is only fools who don't pity and who think of nothing but themselves. It flashed across me then that

she knew where Philippa was, and that it was her doing. But how can I expect you or George to believe me when I have no better reason to give you than that? I told the inspector or detective or whoever he is, Mr. Mills, directly he came."

"What did he say?"

She shook her head.

"Instinct is sometimes a surer guide than reason," said David soothingly.

"Look here, Catherine," said George bluntly and kindly, "don't go worrying about any one's opinion of the strength of your reasoning; tell us exactly what *you* think. No one else knows her so well. And don't stand while you're talking. You look like a washed-out rag; knocking yourself up won't do any good."

Catherine took the chair he pushed forward, and seated herself in mechanical obedience, but she never moved her bright, feverish eyes from David's face. It was in his wit she sought for help; she trusted George's kindness, but had no belief in his intelligence.

"I know this," she said solemnly, "that as for an elopement, as these men suggest—oh, what do they not suggest?"—said Catherine almost writhing, "a—a clandestine love affair or anything of that kind—it is not in Phil's nature. She would never be persuaded—*nobody* could persuade her to do a thing she would know to be wrong or improper. In some ways she is the very soul of con-

scientiousness—of—of conventionality. But this woman, who had so much influence over her——"

"Mme. Minart had influence over Philippa? She had scarcely known her a fortnight," said David quickly.

"When one is young—a fortnight—a week—a day—is sometimes an age," said Catherine; "I have known a girl give her very heart—let her whole life be changed—in a shorter time than that." The colour of her white face never varied, and she spoke with straightforward simplicity, but both men knew that she was thinking of herself. "From the letters she wrote me I know that Mme. Minart obtained an influence over her directly after she came. Philippa was too guileless to conceal it, even if she had wished. She had formed a friendship for Augusta, but I read between the lines of her dear letters that Augusta had disillusioned her, as was inevitable, and that Mme. Minart had consoled her. Poor child! At her age one must idealise some one."

"What do you think Mme. Minart has done?"

"I believe she has inspired some one to decoy my Phil away. The child would be easily imposed upon, for she would have no suspicions of any one. And it must be for money; it could not be for anything else. If it were not for the certainty I feel of this I should go mad," said Catherine with dry eyes and calm voice. "But it could not be to any one's interest to harm my darling, even

if a woman whom Philippa in her innocence loved and believed in could have the heart to betray her to—anything bad. It could not. She is being hidden away in the hopes of a reward."

"It seems the most probable explanation," said David.

"Can't the woman be arrested on suspicion?" said George angrily.

"Mr. Mills says she has given them no excuse whatever for arresting her."

"She is a stranger and a foreigner. Isn't that excuse enough?" growled George.

Catherine smiled wearily.

"He also thinks in our own interests it is better not. She gave them every information they asked concerning her last interview with Philippa, and never faltered nor contradicted herself. And she said that as she considered herself in charge of Philippa she courted the fullest inquiry; and gave them the addresses of her last employers, and of her friend at the registry office, and begged them to search her room or her papers or do anything they chose. He warned her that she would be arrested if she made the slightest attempt to leave the house."

"Just to put her on her guard, I suppose," said George.

"Perhaps he only said it to frighten her. He is having her watched."

"Suppose we ask to see her," said George.

"It might be the simplest plan, since she knows she is suspected. We could threaten her with the law, and give her a chance of escaping punishment by an immediate confession."

Catherine shook her head.

"It will be of no use."

"How do you know that?" said David quickly.

"Because I went on my knees to her this morning," said Catherine, in the same passionless even tones. "If tears would have melted a stone they would have melted her heart; but they did not. I went into her room where she lay asleep —in the dawn—and I woke her, and I prayed her to tell me, and she answered that I was mad with grief, and pretended to be full of concern and pity; but it was no longer the real pity that I saw in her face that first night. She has hardened her heart."

David looked at Catherine pitifully. Her gentle face was pinched and colourless, grown old in a single night with misery; her hazel eyes were unnaturally large, and though her manner was calm, it was only by an intense effort of self-control that that calm was sustained.

Under his look of compassion her lip quivered suddenly.

"Help me to find her," she said, and put a soft, cold hand into his strong fingers.

"I'm going to," he said briefly. "Now you've given me full authority to act for you. But I

like my information first-hand. I should like to see Mme. Minart myself."

"Yes."

"Mr. Mills has given me the facts as he has collected them, let me collect my own."

"Very well, send for whom you choose. If I go out meanwhile," said Catherine, "will you not leave the house till I return?"

"I will not."

"Then I will go and see if Lady Sarah knows anything. She is very clever," said Catherine, "but I shall be very quickly back."

A polite message was sent to Mme. Minart, and she presently came very quietly into the room, bowed to both gentlemen, and accepted the chair that David offered.

"Am I again to be cross-examined?" she said with a faint smile.

"If you please," said David very courteously, "but of course you will understand that we have no authority whatever to ask you questions. I am venturing to assume," he looked keenly at her, "that you are as anxious as we are ourselves that this matter should be cleared up, and the young lady found. We are sure you wish her no harm."

"You do me justice, and you are the first to do so," said Mme. Minart in a voice of emotion, and her dark, liquid eyes met his gaze. "Will you believe me, Monsieur le Colonel, if I tell you that

I love this child with all my heart, though I have known her so short a time; that I have never had any pupil to show me so much love, so much candour, so much generosity?"

"Indeed I believe you," said David warmly, for the ring of sincerity in her beautiful voice was unmistakable. He held out his hand to her.

"I thank you, Monsieur. You are not then of those who would doubt me, like these stupid police, only because I am a stranger and a foreigner?"

George pulled his moustache and knew not where to look.

"Hang it all," he thought uneasily, "one would suppose she had been listening."

But Mme. Minart was not of those who need to listen. A glance at the rubicund good-natured countenance of George, now darkened by his openly suspicious and hostile expression, enabled her to divine his sentiments.

She instantly ignored him, and appealed only to David's finer intelligence and quicker sympathies.

"I have written down," she said simply, "the exact facts—the hours—all I can remember of my conversation with Philippa—to help the police. Here it is."

She handed some notes across the table, inscribed in a minute exquisite French hand.

He read them carefully. "Thank you. Was Philippa in good spirits?"

"More than good spirits—excited, delighted with the triumph of her *début*."

"You went into her room?"

"As you will see written. I assisted her to bed. She said she was too sleepy to plait her hair as usual. I promised that she should not be called until ten o'clock unless she rang."

"Did she not ring on Saturday morning?"

"The servants say not."

"What was the exact hour that her absence was discovered?"

"Between nine-thirty and ten Roper knocked at her door and found her room empty."

"But the policeman saw her out of doors soon after nine. So she must have left her room before nine."

"Obviously."

"Did no one see her go downstairs?"

"They say not."

"You say that Lady Adelstane was, very naturally, overcome by the news which was taken to her at nine o'clock?"

"Lady Adelstane had an attack," said Mme. Minart, in brief, expressive tones; "to you I speak frankly—she had hysterics. The house was roused."

"Who went to her?"

"Her maid was with her, and Mrs. Joliffe the housekeeper, but she was of no use—weeping and crying. Holland sent for Roper; she would

not send for me, because she was jealous, but I went. The head-housemaid answered the bell, and the doctor was sent for."

"Who went for the doctor?"

"No one went—the butler telephoned."

"Who went down to tell the butler?"

"The housemaid."

"What was Roper doing?"

Mme. Minart shrugged her shoulders.

"Rubbing Miladi's hands, holding the salts to her nose; bathing her head. The two maids held together. They would not let me help. I made suggestions and opened the windows."

"Who remained in the room when the doctor came?"

"Holland and Roper. I remained in the dressing-room with Mrs. Joliffe."

"That was at ten o'clock?"

"He was gone before ten o'clock."

"And then Roper went upstairs to her young lady?"

"She went downstairs first to fetch her young lady's cup of tea, and then up to her room."

"Did you not think it strange Philippa should hear none of this commotion?"

"No; Philippa's room is on the floor above, and not over or anywhere near Miladi's room. It is shut off by a baize door from the front part of the house."

"Where is your room?"

"Down the same passage."

"And Roper's?"

"Further down the same passage."

"When Roper found Philippa's room empty what did she do?"

"She went to the breakfast-room, and, finding no one there, supposed Philippa had gone to Miladi while she was fetching the tea. She waited an hour outside Miladi's room till Holland came out, not daring to knock because the doctor had given a composing draught. Then she learnt that Philippa had not been near Miladi and then she came to me. I was having my breakfast in the morning-room as usual."

"Had you not been anxious to know how Philippa would take the news of her cousin's death?"

"I had promised to leave her old nurse to tell her, and withdrawn myself from the affair. I thought she would come to me. When it became evident she was not in the house, we thought she had heard the news and gone out to telegraph to her mother. At twelve Miladi sent for her, and we were obliged to say she could not be found. Miladi thought she had heard the news and gone home, and was very angry. But Pilkington sent a telegram to the station-master at Ilverton to know if Philippa had arrived, and the reply came that she had not. Miladi grew frightened and telegraphed to Lady Adelstane to come."

"Thank you very much. And now tell us," said David very simply, "what do *you* think?"

"I?" said Mme. Minart, and a sudden colour flushed her olive cheeks.

"I believe you could help us better than any one, for you have been Philippa's friend and *confidante* during these past days that she has been away from her mother's care. If there was anything on her mind, you would know it."

"Was she in any scrape?" said George bluntly.

Mme. Minart scarcely deigned to glance at him.

"Certainly not," she said in disdain.

"Was she—" David hesitated and coloured all over his bronzed face, the more deeply because he was aware that Mme. Minart was observing him. "Had you any reason to think that she was—or fancied herself—in love?"

"Ah, Monsieur," said Mme. Minart gently, would you have me betray a young girl's secret if that was so?"

"Nonsense, she's scarcely more than a child, and in any case her secret would be safe enough with us," said George. "Then there *is* something of that kind?"

"She has not told me so," said Mme. Minart coldly.

David came to her side, and took her hand in his impulsive fashion.

"Madame," he said, "we are asking you to trust us. This child is very dear to both, for her

own sake, and her mother's. Do not, out of mistaken kindness, endeavour to keep back anything."

"That is the only motive you would attribute to me, Monsieur?" said Mme. Minart emotionally.

"I would not insult you—after the appeal you have made to us, your voluntary declaration of your affection for her—by supposing that any other motive save kindness to her, or to us, would influence you to keep back information which might help us to find her," he said warmly.

Mme. Minart looked up into the kind, frank, manly face with a very agitated smile, and a tear in her dark eyes.

"Ah, Monsieur," she said, "you would never appeal in vain, believe me, to a woman. It is true that the child is in love; but it is also true that she has not told me so, for a very simple reason."

"And that is——"

"That she does not know it herself."

"Then it is mere conjecture on your part?" said George roughly.

"If you like to put it in that way, yes, Monsieur," she retorted. "And for that reason I do not choose to reveal the name of him to whom I believe this young girl, in all innocence, has given her heart."

"Then I don't see the use of your having told us the fact," said George sulkily.

"It is of no use, for it can have nothing to do

with her disappearance, since he also is of those who search," she said patiently. "M. le Colonel, however, asked me the question."

"And I thank you for answering it," said David. "But, as Mr. Chilcott says, it is not material if it has nothing to do with her disappearance, and you think it has not?"

"I am sure it has not."

"Then what *do* you think?" he asked, fixing his eyes entreatingly on her face.

"Ah, mon Dieu, Monsieur," said Mme Minart in agitated tones, "you torture me when you question me thus. Do you think I would not help you if I could?" Her voice was low, almost tender, her dark eyes eloquent with reproach. "Myself, I have the conviction, like Miladi, that she will return safe and sound. She is full of romance. Who can tell where she may have been pleased to go? Comfort yourself to think she is strong and healthy, and that she had a purse full of money, and is well able to take care of herself."

"No girl of that age *can* take care of herself," said George sternly.

This was the end of their questioning of Mme. Minart, and they felt they had gained nothing from the interview, which had the effect, however, of dispersing David's suspicions of the companion; and the more especially when the tearful Roper, though evidently detesting her, corroborated her story in every detail.

"She knows nothing," said David to George.

"I am not so sure," said George.

"My dear fellow, you mistrust her, as she says, merely because she is a stranger and a foreigner."

"Perhaps. Anyway, I don't believe a word she says," he replied very bluntly.

"You think Catherine's suspicions are justified then?"

"I don't know what to think. The only sure thing is that Philippa has disappeared, and it's either that she's gone off for a lark, which doesn't seem the least like her, or that she's been decoyed away for blackmailing purposes by some one who had heard of poor Adelstane's death and knew she was his heiress."

"Aye, that's just it," interposed David, "that practically exonerates Mme. Minart. How in the name of fortune could she have made up a plot to get Philippa decoyed away, which would necessarily mean employing an accomplice, within a couple of hours of the first possible moment she could have learnt of poor Adelstane's fate?"

George shook his head.

"Perhaps we are all wrong in mixing up this sad event with Philippa's disappearance. She may simply have gone out to buy something; lost her way and strayed into some unfrequented street—God knows what may have happened to her in that case."

"Do not put that into Catherine's head," said

David hastily. "No doubt that is what the police fear. Of course there is just the chance, though——"

"Well——"

"Mme. Minart believes her to be in love; of course it's with this young ass, Kentisbury, who made a conspicuous fool of himself at the Lundys' dance, following her about," said David rather savagely. "She may have taken fright—at him, or herself, or something—girls are very fanciful, you know, and be hiding herself. It doesn't sound probable, but it's possible."

"It's not at all like Philippa. She is a thoroughly healthy, sensible girl, not a mysterious idiot," said George stoutly. "And I don't believe Mme. Minart knows her half so well as she pretends to. Phil is a bit spoilt and obstinate, but she's a well-bred 'un, not the least likely to give herself away if she was in love a dozen times over, with Kentisbury or any other young fool."

"I had almost rather it was with any other young fool; the fellow looks such a confounded noodle," said David gloomily.

Catherine knelt by Lady Sarah's chair, and hid her face upon the flowered lilac satin sleeves of Lady Sarah's gown.

For the first time since the blow had fallen she found a moment's comfort in human sympathy.

"My poor child—my darling Catherine," murmured the old woman in a broken voice hardly recognisable as her own; and the rare painful tears of age dropped slowly, one by one, on to the bent head, where threads of silver shone among the soft brown hair.

"And it is I who should be comforting you—who have lost your—your last child," Catherine sobbed. "I feel so disloyal, so heartless, when I think of *him;* and yet—this other trouble has swallowed up everything."

"It is Philippa who is my last child now," said Lady Sarah. "Do not give way, my darling. It is the living of whom we must think, not the dead. *His* hopes, like ours, were bound up in her."

The hand which rested on Catherine's soft hair trembled slightly. She thought remorsefully that it was she who had advised Catherine to part with her child; and that Catherine had not uttered a single reproach, nor reminded her of the fact which Lady Sarah could not forget.

"You know that Augusta has been here? She is going to the Abbey with you to-morrow," she says.

"But I am not going to stay," said Catherine. "I shall get there in time for—for the inquest. But directly that is over—oh, how dreadful, how dreadful it all is!—David says I shall be able to come straight back. I need not stay the night,

I could not. And besides—the Ralts are going to stay with her. She says she does not want them, but it is better they should go, and Grace Trumoin will go too. The Ralts have been very kind. They have placed a motor at David's disposal. They say we shall have more clues by the time I return, to follow up."

"Catherine, save your strength for to-morrow, and rest to-night."

"How can I rest, and my darling perhaps—" she gave a little cry and shudder. "I dare not think. I must not stay with you even now. But I felt you had been neglected, and I hoped you might have some idea—some suggestion." She uttered a little mirthless laugh that went to Lady Sarah's heart. "But perhaps you are too wise to offer suggestions that almost drive one mad with their unlikelihood. The detective, Mr. Mills, has been questioning and questioning till I am almost mad. And then one must go through it all again with somebody else. He asked me if she had been happy at home. My little Phil, my baby, for whom I would lay down my life; was she happy with me?" She looked calmly and with inexpressible sadness at Lady Sarah. "And the dreadful part is this—that I could not honestly say yes," said Catherine.

"Hush, my darling, hush! you little foolish creature," said Lady Sarah, to whom Catherine, even yet seemed almost a child herself. "She

was as happy as the day is long. She had everything to make her happy."

"She did not think so," said Catherine with a wan smile. "That is the sad, funny thing, you know. It wasn't our love, nor our care and petting she wanted, but something new, something different."

"Girls are full of fancies and ingratitude, and senselessness," said Lady Sarah angrily. "You are a fool, my love, to dwell upon such nonsense."

"Girls are full of fancies—yes, that is what Mr. Mills said," said Catherine wearily, and she leaned her head on her hand, and thought of the questions she had been asked, and which she had resented, in the midst of her anxiety to afford every possible help, every imaginable clue, to the questioner.

"Happy? How can I say? I've thought of nothing but her happiness from morning till night. What has that to do with her disappearance? She has been decoyed away," she had said.

"Madam, in our experience it has a good deal to do with girls of that age leaving their homes," the inspector had answered bluntly. "At fifteen or sixteen they often get, if you'll excuse me, ma'am, discontented with everything, no matter what's done for them; fancying no one understands them, or working themselves up so that you'd almost begin to believe they were ill-

treated, though you know to the contrary." Then he had been touched by Catherine's distress and had begged her pardon. "You'll excuse my plain speaking, ma'am, but I've daughters of my own," he said compassionately. "Dealing with some girls of that age is like treading on eggs. And it stands to reason that a young lady accustomed to indulge every whim——"

"She was not," cried Catherine.

But the inspector had heard a very different story from Augusta, who, being in an excessively injured frame of mind, and feeling that, at least, she could not be held responsible for the disposition of Catherine's daughter, had vented her indignation against Philippa by roundly declaring her to be the most ungrateful, pig-headed, wilful, sullen-tempered girl in the world, who cared for nothing but having her own way, and who thought of nobody but herself from morning till night.

But Catherine was fortunately all unaware of the character which Augusta had drawn of her young cousin and guest.

Lady Sarah shook her head sadly.

"It is all a mystery to me," she said. "I saw next to nothing of Philippa—Augusta took care of that."

"The description of my darling will be in every newspaper in England to-morrow," said Catherine. "I wrote it for them. They said there was no hope of avoiding publicity, and

that indeed publicity gives us the best chance of finding her quickly."

She started nervously to her feet.

"I must go. I feel every moment something may be happening, and I not there to help."

"Don't forget me," said Lady Sarah pathetically. "Spare me a few moments when you can. I am very old and helpless and lonely, Catherine, sitting here by myself."

Even in the midst of her heart-sickening anxiety Catherine could not but realise how shaken the old woman's nerves must be, before Lady Sarah—stern, ironical, and self-controlled through all her past sorrows—could make such an appeal.

CHAPTER XVI

"I MUST write to Catherine at once," said Mrs. Chilcott, who was ever ready to condole with her relatives on their misfortunes, though she was invariably dumb concerning their successes.

She mistook the eagerness with which she proceeded to indite a letter to Catherine for the haste of charity; and, though it was impossible not to be shocked at the double disaster which had befallen the house of Adelstane, yet Mrs. Chilcott—who had always been jealous of the promotion by marriage into that house of her humble niece Catherine—was not destitute of that secret sense of triumph in another's trouble which is perhaps among the most evil of all sensations to which poor human nature is prone.

She was, besides, just sufficiently pious to feel convinced that other people's trials were always sent for the best by a discerning Providence

"What could Catherine expect, letting a country hoyden go alone to that fast worldly woman's house, with no one to look after her?" she said to her daughter.

"There was Roper," said Clara, whose eyes

were swollen with honest grief for the untimely death of Sir Cecil Adelstane, and for the unaccountable disappearance of her cousin Philippa.

"Roper, a half-witted drudge whom Catherine chose to pick out of my own laundry for her daughter's nurse," said Mrs. Chilcott sarcastically.

"She is a very honest, good steady woman, mamma."

"I am perfectly aware what Roper is like," said Mrs. Chilcott sharply, "and a more unsuitable, ignorant maid for Philippa could not have been found."

"Where do you think poor Philippa can be?" said Clara in awe-struck tones.

"Who can tell? Either she has eloped with a footman or a chauffeur—going about in Lord Kentisbury's motor, indeed, at her age!—or else, roaming alone in the streets of London before breakfast, as it appears she was permitted to do she has been robbed and murdered."

"Oh, mamma!" screamed Clara, and she lost every vestige of colour. "Do not say so—poor little Philippa, and oh, poor—poor Catherine!"

A tear rolled down Clara's large face; for though she was not a very intelligent person she had a heart, and was sincere and even kind in her way.

"Don't be a fool, Clara. For my part I am not going to pretend to be fond of a girl who was deliberately kept away from her own relations, and taught to look down on them," said Mrs.

Chilcott angrily. "I am quite as shocked and sorry as you can possibly be; more so, for I am able to realise her fate a great deal better than you can, who know nothing whatever of the wickedness of the world; but I am not going to pretend to be surprised. I always knew that no good could possibly come of the absurd way Catherine was bringing her up. The pride that apes humility indeed! Living in a labourer's cottage when every one knew she must inherit the Abbey. Though it would have been hard to find any one more unsuited for such a position."

"Mamma, if poor Philippa is never found, who will it all go to?" said Clara solemnly.

"After a certain lapse of time, to a distant cousin," said Mrs. Chilcott, who knew no more of the matter than her daughter, but who would have invented a dozen answers rather than admit ignorance on any conceivable subject. "When one thinks how terribly poor Sir Cecil would have felt all this horrible publicity and scandal, and these dreadful newspaper advertisements, one almost feels his removal from it all like a special Providence."

Clara, who had not hitherto regarded Sir Cecil's fatal accident in this light, mournfully accepted her mother's view in good faith.

"It is well, indeed, that he should be spared it all," she said, wiping her eyes.

"There is one thing I insist on," said Mrs.

Chilcott, "and that is, that you go at once and fetch Lily home. She was entrusted to Catherine, and Catherine has chosen to leave her. I won't have her left with Aunt Dulcinea, half crazy as she has always been, and totally unsuited to look after herself or any one else. I should hope even George will acknowledge now that Catherine has proved herself sufficiently unfit to have charge of a child."

Clara was nothing loth to undertake the task of fetching her niece home. She was sincerely attached to Lily, and very sore at her brother's ingratitude for her own praiseworthy efforts to undertake his daughter's education.

"Of course she is an unusually naughty child," thought poor Clara; "but I make every excuse for her when I recollect what a faulty disposition she must have inherited, as mamma truly says, from poor Delia. Sometimes she behaves like a demon, and George gives one no credit for putting up with it. But I try to remember he is a widower, and make allowance for his weakness."

She told her mother of her fears that it would not be easy to bring Lily away from Shepherd's Rest against her will; since the child's innate wickedness made it probable that she would not wish to return to her lawful guardians.

"And it will hurt Aunt Dulcinea's feelings, I know, when I explain to her as I must," said the

conscientious Clara, "that I do not think her at all a fit person to have charge of Lily."

"I never mind what I say to people for their good, and why should you?" said Mrs. Chilcott sternly. "A little plain speaking will do Aunt Dulcinea no harm, and she only keeps away from me because she is afraid of getting it."

On the afternoon following this conversation, Miss Clara ordered the victoria, and drove up to Shepherd's Rest.

The coachman would have grumbled indignantly at any other time, upon receiving the order to take his horses up the steep and narrow lane which led to the cottage; for it was the family custom to leave the carriage in the road below, and climb the hill on foot; but just now local curiosity and sympathy were stimulated to a degree which made every opportunity for obtaining news of the missing heiress welcome, and he carried out his instructions with alacrity.

"It is Aunt Clara, I told you so," said Lily; and she turned white, clutching old Miss Dulcinea's soft hand with frail nervous fingers. "She has come to fetch me."

"Bless the child, don't look like that," said Miss Dulcinea, frightened. "I won't let you go. There, my dear, I promise!"

"Oh, you will, you will," wailed Lily, who had small faith in Miss Dulcinea's strength of mind.

"I will not," said the old lady shortly. "I

should hope I know how to face Clara by this time."

"Then say you don't know where I am, and I will hide," said Lily, and she flew like an arrow from a bow, from the house-place where they were sitting, through the dairy and into the farmyard.

"Lily, Lily, my child, come back! Let there be no more hiding," cried Miss Dulcinea, calling after her in terror. "Oh, Sally, run, run after her. Don't let her out of your sight. I am so nervous now, I can't bear to lose sight of any one for a moment," she cried to the little maid, who was busy skimming the cream, and who willingly left her work and ran in pursuit of the truant.

Clara did not go through the formality of knocking at the humble door of Catherine's cottage; for she measured her politeness by the size of her neighbours' houses, and was accustomed to intrude upon the privacy of the villagers without hesitation or apology.

"Here you are, Aunt Dulcinea," she said, "I have brought the carriage—Bonner was very good about it, though he must have been annoyed at bringing his horses up that dreadful road; but I ordered the old victoria, so that the sides getting scratched wouldn't matter so much, and I have come to take Lily home."

"But I have promised not to let her go, Clara," said poor Miss Dulcinea nervously. "The child

wishes to stay here where her father placed her, you know."

"George placed her in Catherine's care, and, as mamma says, a terrible lesson has he had, to show him the unsuitability of Catherine for such a trust," said Clara solemnly. "But he would never have sent her to stay with you, Aunt Dulcinea. That is quite a different thing. Catherine is not, as mamma says, a practical person, but she has, of course, a certain position as the widow of Sir Philip Adelstane, though she has foolishly never even tried to live up to it. But it is a very different thing from leaving Lily with you."

"Am I not her grandfather's own sister," cried Miss Dulcinea indignantly; "her own aunt?"

"You are her great-aunt, of course. Nobody ever denied that. But it is I who am her aunt, and mamma said I was to fetch her."

"Has George written?"

"How could George write? He is searching for Philippa day and night. But of course he would not wish Lily to remain now that Catherine has gone. And I must say, though I make every excuse for the dreadful state poor Catherine must be in—and we all pity her, I am sure, from the bottom of our hearts—yet she ought to have brought Lily home when she went to London. It is not as if our house wasn't on the way to the station, for it is. And I am determined to take Lily, Aunt Dulcinea, so please say no more about it."

"And I am equally determined no one shall take her without authority from George," cried Miss Dulcinea indignantly; "I wonder you can want to take her away, Clara, I do indeed, when you know how well she is, and how happily she is occupied. Look at the drawing she was doing when you interrupted us. I declare it is the funniest thing that was ever seen, and as like me as two peas, as I can see for myself, for that is just the way my cap falls to one side when I drop off into a nap."

"Caricaturing is a very bad habit," said Clara sharply.

"Well, and so it may be, but I don't see why you should call it a caricature, for it is just a very excellent likeness," said honest Miss Dulcinea simply. "She takes after her poor mother, and draws everything she sees. I believe the child is a genius!"

Clara was indignant, as persons of her calibre in all ages have ever been, at the mere supposition that a contemporary of their own could be a genius.

"I never heard such rubbish, Aunt Dulcinea. You needn't think to put me off by showing me Lily's drawings. As if I had not seen them often enough, and punished her too for spoiling the edges of her copybooks. Please send for her at once. Surely you can see that I mean what I say."

"Do you think I am one to give up a little thing who clings to us, at half a word from my own niece? You can just go home by yourself, Clara, and that's all about it." And Miss Dulcinea sat down with her hand to her heart, and a very bright colour in her soft old cheeks.

"I do not think you can be serious, Aunt Dulcinea," said Clara, "when I tell you I have brought the carriage all the way up here for no other purpose than to take Lily back. Bonner had actually to drive into that rough paddock to turn round."

"It does not matter. The hay was cut long ago," said Miss Dulcinea defiantly.

"Does not matter!" said Clara, hardly able to believe her ears. "When you know we *never* bring the carriage up here? I cannot think you know half you are saying, Aunt Dulcinea. And if you will excuse me, I shall not waste time arguing with you any more. I shall call Lily for myself."

"Clara, I cannot give you authority to run over Catherine's house, and I am sure she would not like it," said Miss Dulcinea, trembling with apprehension.

"I am quite as nearly related to Catherine as you are. It would be hard, indeed, if relations could not go in and out of each other's houses without ceremony. And I have mamma's author-

ity, which is much more than yours could ever be," said Clara importantly.

But in vain did she call, and in vain did she question the overgrown Johnny Roper and the rosy-faced maiden, whom she discovered, to her great indignation, giggling together in the farmyard.

"There is no order, no discipline, on Catherine's estate, small as it is," sighed Clara, and she grew hot and tired searching the farm premises and beyond them. Her loud voice echoed through the rafters of stable and barn, and reached the darkest recesses of the little wood; until Bonner sent a pointed message to inquire if he were to keep the horses standing any longer, or to put them up.

"It is you who are backing up Lily, or she would not have dared to behave so," said Clara, when at length she retired baffled from the quest. "I shall tell mamma, Aunt Dulcinea, and she will know what to do. You need not think she will give in."

Miss Dulcinea did not know whether to laugh or to cry. She watched the insulted Clara drive away, and when she was quite out of sight, ventured to the north door of the dairy, and uttered a timid call or two upon her own account.

"Here I am, Auntie," said Lily, and she slid down the great oak at the back of the cottage with a suddenness which caused Miss Dulcinea

to scream aloud. "I thought of King Charles, you know, and climbed up in a minute and Sally ran just underneath me to the farmyard. It was so funny!"

"Promise me never to do so again. You might have broken your neck, my darling. And oh, what a scene poor Lydia will make! O dear, O dear, that there should be so much trouble and unpleasantness in this world on such a beautiful evening as this!" said poor Miss Dulcinea, bursting into tears.

"Was Aunt Clara so very horrid?" said Lily, putting her arms round the old lady's neck protectingly. "Never mind, Auntie, all you have to do now is to write a telegram to papa, and ask him to say I may stop with you till Cousin Catherine comes home."

"The sense of the child!" said poor Miss Dulcinea; "why didn't I think of it before?" and she sat down and wrote out with trembling fingers a message to her nephew, and desired Johnny Roper to convey it to the post-office immediately.

The single clue supplied by the policeman at the corner of Belgrave Square had multiplied into a thousand others, bewildering by very reason of their number and variety, before the day fixed for the funeral of Sir Cecil Adelstane, which was the fifth after Philippa's disappearance.

It would seem that tall schoolgirls, in blue serge dresses and black straw hats, abounded in every quarter of London and the suburbs; and that they all answered minutely to the description of Philippa, and had been observed at one hour or another of that fateful Saturday, travelling by rail or by road in every possible direction.

Paragraphs with sensational headings—"Abduction of an Heiress," "Mysterious Disappearance of Sir Cecil Adelstane's Niece on the Day of his Death," "Supposed Elopement of the greatest Heiress in England"—appeared in the daily papers, after the insertion of the advertisements and the offers of large rewards for any information leading to her discovery. Explanations of similar mysterious disappearances of young girls were recalled, and related at length in the newspapers, and David Moore spent the most anxious days and nights of his life in the Ralts' automobile, following up every suggestion with the energy of despair, and interviewing hundreds of persons who were anxious to obtain any portion of the proposed rewards, though they had nothing to offer in exchange.

Catherine became but the ghost of herself in those five days. The look in her great eyes, wild with misery, and unnaturally bright with sleeplessness, haunted David's thoughts, and drove him to make incredible exertions, but all to no purpose.

He refused to leave London to attend the funeral at Welwysbere, and no one proposed that Catherine should do so. Her days and nights were possessed with the thought of her child, and she showed not the slightest interest in the information that Sir Cecil had appointed her executrix of his will and trustee of Philippa's inheritance, jointly with George Chilcott. All the necessary business was left to George, who was surprised and touched by this mark of the esteem in which poor Sir Cecil had held him, and who was perforce obliged to leave the search for the missing heiress to others, while he attended first the inquest and then the funeral of his friend and neighbour, and listened to the explanations of Mr. Ash.

The yacht was left to Augusta, but the Abbey was not, as she expected, to be hers for life, but was willed direct to Philippa, to be maintained or let, until her coming of age or marriage, according to the discretion of the trustees; while the Adelstane jewels, and every farthing Sir Cecil possessed outside his marriage settlements, went with the estate.

Augusta in the midst of her grief, and the shock of seeing herself for the first time in widow's weeds, found time to be astonished and offended at the provisions of her late husband's testament.

"Of course I bought the house in Belgrave

Square and my river bungalow with my own money; and my own diamonds are finer than anything the Adelstanes ever owned, though they may not be so old," she said to Lady Grace; "but really one might say I owe nothing to poor Cecil, at this rate, except the yacht, which, of course, I shall sell. How can a woman go yachting by herself? And if she took any one with her there would only be a talk. But I did think I should have had the Abbey for my life."

"Perhaps it was not in his power."

"That is all nonsense. I am sure it must have been."

"You know you always hated the place, Augusta."

"I shall hate it more than ever, now that it is left away from me so oddly," said Augusta, weeping. "Oh, Grace, how little did we think when we left this house only a few weeks ago—you and me—that when we came back I should be—a widow!"

"Poor Augusta!"

"Just fancy, Grace, if only poor Cecil had come up to town with us, instead of bothering himself over this stupid business with the agent, he would have been alive now."

With such reflections, oft repeated, did Augusta beguile the hours that elapsed between the funeral and the reading of her late husband's will, and her departure from the Abbey; and her

bosom friend found her trite ejaculations excessively wearisome, as she sat patiently by the side of Lady Adelstane's couch, in her carefully darkened boudoir.

"I suppose I look too dreadful," wailed Augusta. "I can't sleep at night, what with thinking what has become of Philippa, and this dreadful blow. I feel all this trouble must have made its mark on me, and I hardly dare look at my own face in the glass, feeling as I do!"

"Black is very becoming to you," said Lady Grace; "but, of course, crying is not becoming to any one. If I were you I should try not to cry any more. What good does it do?"

"That is what Blanche says. She is so unsympathetic," sobbed Augusta resentfully. "Yet if I show the slightest interest in anything practical, she is ready to hint that I never cared for poor Cecil at all. One's relatives are very poor comfort in time of trouble, I must say."

"They are very poor comfort at any time, so far as I have ever been able to make out," said Lady Grace. "Try not to talk about it, Gussie, and you will grow calmer."

But Augusta had no idea of growing calmer until the first days of mourning should be over, and gave full vent to her emotions upon every opportunity.

"How her ladyship du take on," said the west-country servants admiringly. But Pilking-

ton contented himself with a dark reminder that shallow water made most noise.

George Chilcott proposed to escort Augusta back to town on the morning after the funeral, when, as Philippa's trustee, he felt doubly bound to devote himself to the search. He had replied to Miss Dulcinea's telegram with a peremptory request that she should keep Lily at Shepherd's Rest, and as he wrote a line to the same effect to Clara, the effort to reclaim the child had been abandoned by his mother and sister, and George did not, in the midst of his new cares, give much thought to his little daughter, of whose happiness he felt assured, and whom he had not time to visit.

But as he stood upon the platform at Ilverton, watching the arrival of the Welwysbere carriage, and the almost reverential reception of the new-made widow, whose face was hidden by an opaque crape veil, and who leant the weight of her affliction heavily upon the arm of her good-natured brother-in-law, followed by Blanche Ralt and Grace Trumoin—George was startled by a sudden timid touch upon his arm.

There stood little Lily, looking up at him with great frightened eyes, though a furtive smile hovered about her face, which was something plumper and rosier than when he had seen it last.

"Why, my little Lily," he said, surprised and startled at this unexpected apparition. He lifted her from the ground to brush her forehead with his moustache. "Has Aunt Dulcinea brought you down to see your dad off? That is very good of her."

"Don't be angry, papa," faltered Lily.

"You came alone?" George looked vexed and a worried pucker rose between his brows. "That was not right, Lily."

"No, no, Sally came. I go for walks with Sally," and she indicated a cheerful ruddy countenance in the background of Augusta's solemn train of black-clad retainers. "Aunt Dulcinea said I might come—she did not like to intrude—" said Lily, in an awe-struck whisper, with another quick glance towards the black-clad group. "But she said no one would mind *me*, as I am so little. She did not know *why* I wanted so much to come."

"Not to see me?" said George, relieved of his fears lest Lily should have lapsed into evil ways under the feeble rule of poor Miss Dulcinea.

"I wanted to see you, daddy," said Lily, with the coaxing accent which Clara deprecated, and she laid her face against the big hand. Then she looked up imploringly and cried, "Oh, daddy, take me with you!"

"Why, I thought you wanted so much to stay at Shepherd's Rest? Wasn't that what you wanted?"

"Yes, yes, I like being there," said Lily almost feverishly. "But it's not that, it's not that! Oh, daddy, daddy, I want to go to Cousin Catherine."

"My dear," said George gently, "don't you know Cousin Catherine is in very great trouble now? She couldn't think of you or of anything else."

"I know, I know, but I don't want her to think of me. I want to comfort her," said Lily, clasping her little thin hands with a gesture so like Delia's, that George almost started. "I daresay you think it would be impossible, a little girl like me; but, oh, you don't know how Cousin Catherine cried at night when Philippa went to London, and she said it comforted her then to have me with her, and I am sure it would comfort her again now. Oh, do take me, I could comfort her at night," said the child almost passionately, "and every one says it will kill her if Philippa is never found any more."

George Chilcott pulled his moustache irresolutely. His heart inclined him to take Lily to London.

"If I thought it would comfort Catherine," he said, and looked appealing at Lady Grace and Mrs. Ralt, who had greeted him in silence, and now stood looking down at the little anxious questioner, who was too much absorbed in her request to have even noted their proximity. "But

I couldn't take you in any case to-day, there would have to be all sorts of arrangements made. I'll think about it, Lily, and perhaps send for you later."

"But there need be no arrangements, for I have made them all," said the little creature, trembling with hope. She was holding a tightly packed brown-paper parcel under her left arm, which she now produced and exhibited. "I have brought my nightgown and my tooth-brush and a pair of shoes and three clean pocket-handkerchiefs in case you should say yes. And I have my Sunday frock on. I am all ready for London, papa, I am indeed!"

"Poor little thing!" said Lady Grace.

"Such forethought ought to be rewarded," said Mrs. Ralt, her hearty tones somewhat subdued to attune with her mourning garb. I believe it might do Catherine good, if anything would," she said. "Let's take her along, Mr. Chilcott. Grace and I will look after her, and if Catherine doesn't want her, why, there's no harm done, for I'll take her to my hotel, and welcome."

"It's most awfully kind of you," said George; "but there's Miss Dulcinea to be thought of."

"I have written a letter for Sally to take back; she has it in her pocket. I tried to think of everything," said Lily's small treble. "I didn't want nobody to be anxious about me."

Having thus miraculously obtained her wish, and heard Augusta's faint assent to Mrs. Ralt's proposition that the child should travel with them, Lily had the sense to efface herself as much as possible, following Lady Grace like a shadow, and not daring to utter a sound in Augusta's portly sable-shrouded presence.

She curled herself into the corner of the compartment she was told to enter, and looked out of the window, watching her father give a leaf out of his pocket-book to Sally for Miss Dulcinea, and send her away, and hardly daring to breathe until the train was off, when she ventured upon a whispered inquiry.

"Isn't daddy coming?"

"He is in a smoking carriage."

She was so small and slight for her age, that she was used to being lifted on to people's knees, and, after an hour or two of patient silence in her corner, accepted gratefully the overtures of Lady Grace, and came and sat in her lap. Their conversation was carried on in whispers for fear of waking Augusta; until presently drowsiness overtook Lily herself, and she fell asleep with her head on her friend's shoulder.

To Grace Trumoin it was almost a strange sensation to have a child slumbering in her arms, and she felt very tenderly towards Lily, whose black eyelashes lay against such a small pale face that she looked scarcely more than a baby

as she slept. The thin childish arms embraced her waist, and the little dark head gradually drooped until it lay in the hollow of her arm, and it was so that Lily's father saw them together, when the train stopped at Swindon.

The warm colour rose in Lady Grace's face as she met his pleased grateful look, because, alas, she knew that Blanche Ralt was looking on and approving, in the belief that she was acting by design, and playing her cards well in the pre-arranged game of matrimony.

"He will not think so," she said to herself sadly; "he is indeed without guile, humble and unsuspecting in his strength and his honesty. And if *they* knew what was in my heart—what a longing for duties clear, and simple, and straightforward, for a place of rest, to be necessary to some one, even if it were only this poor little girl—they would not understand; with their kind vulgar scheming to find George Chilcott a wife, and me a home of my own."

But she did Blanche Ralt, at least, injustice; for though she might be vulgar, and a schemer, she would have understood, and but that she believed Grace Trumoin would make George's happiness and her own in the hoped-for marriage, she would not have lifted her little finger to bring it about.

The agony of joy which little Lily exhibited when she threw herself into Catherine's arms

melted the hearts of all who were present except Catherine herself; for there is, perhaps, no heart so dead towards another woman's child as that of the mother who has just lost her own.

Poor little Lily, who had mistaken Catherine's motherly tenderness, and the caresses which had been heaped upon her at Shepherd's Rest for evidence that she was as dearly loved as Philippa herself, felt all the chill of disappointment without knowing why, and the conviction that they had made a mistake flashed upon Blanche Ralt, who drew Catherine aside.

"Look here, Catherine, there is no reason you should be saddled with that kid. Let me take her to the hotel with us. Or, here is Grace Trumoin dying to take charge of her. They've taken a regular fancy to one another. And you look like a ghost, you're not fit to have her with you. But the poor little atom, you see, took it into her head that she would be a comfort to you."

"A comfort!" Catherine almost smiled.

"Aye—well, I see we were a pack of fools; but you know we didn't want to leave a stone unturned—and if she could have brought you the merest shred—one never knows. A child, or an animal, I've often found are better comforters to us in trouble than we can be to each other—though I've never known such trouble as yours. But you sha'n't be bothered——"

"Stay!" cried Catherine, recovering herself. "I am growing selfish and hateful in my trouble. Did I seem unloving to Delia's child, poor little Lily?"

"Of course it's understood you want nobody's child about you just now," said Blanche.

"How could I be so unkind!" said Catherine, and with a sudden revulsion of feeling she ran to Lily, who was standing forlornly at the end of the room, holding her father's hand, and clinging faithfully to her brown-paper parcel. She kissed the child many times to make amends for her coldness, vehemently insisting that she should remain in charge of herself and Roper, and not be carried off to Lady Grace's flat or Mrs. Ralt's hotel.

"I am sure I have no objection, I am only too willing to agree to anything that can be of any comfort to anybody," said Augusta faintly, when Catherine appealed for her consent to this arrangement. "Only, mind, I distinctly decline to be responsible for her. I have had quite enough, Catherine, of trying to take care of other people's children."

CHAPTER XVII

HOWEVER deep the sorrow, the comments of a fool can still aggravate the torments of anxiety, as the worrying of a cur tortured the dying lion in the fable.

"Here is Friday and no news. I am almost beginning to give up hope, aren't you, Catherine?" wailed Augusta.

"I shall never give up hope," said Catherine, with white lips.

"It's a week to-morrow," said Augusta. "I simply can't understand it. I always thought the police were so clever. I must say I shall never think so again."

"They are doing their best; and many others are searching besides the police."

"What do you *really* think has become of her?" said Augusta.

She asked this question at intervals with maddening persistency, and made, besides, endless suggestions of no practical value, greatly to her own satisfaction and the impatience of her family.

"If it were possible to request Augusta to

walk out of her own house," said old Lady Sarah to Catherine, who went daily to Curzon Street to make her sorrowful report of failure, "it would afford me sincere pleasure to do so. I suppose one can't go as far as that. I came very near asking her to leave mine this morning, however. There she sat, asking me who came next to Philippa in the succession. I told her, Philippa's son," said the old lady, fuming, "and was within an ace of flinging this scent-bottle at her head. I wish I had done it, too. At my age no one could say much, no matter what I did. I should plead softening of the brain, or senile decay," and she laughed grimly. "But what can you expect? I don't believe she has ever given a sincere thought to poor Cecil's death; she is so taken up with her own widowhood." Then her tone changed to bitterness. "Oh, my dear, my dear, why don't you reproach me with my fool's advice to you?"

"Do not reproach yourself," said Catherine, and she kissed the soft old hand. "It was not only you, it was poor Cecil too, and David Moore. All so different, and yet all seeing no reason why I should not let my darling go."

"I would kill myself if it would do any good," said Lady Sarah vehemently.

"And I shouldn't have listened to any of you—if it had not been—oh, if it had not been, that *she* wished it so much. I never forget that," said

Catherine with quivering lips. "Oh, Lady Sarah, you are very clever—cannot you think of something more that we could do?"

"My dear, my dear, I wish I could. But there is no reason for any one but Augusta to give up hope," said Lady Sarah, affecting a cheerfulness she did not feel. "No blackmailer could come forward in the midst of this hue and cry. They would be certain to wait until some of the excitement had died down, and until they could get her safely away and bargain from a coign of vantage. It is the best sign possible that we can hear nothing, that there has been no news.

Catherine kissed the soft old hand again in silence. Her misery was too deep for words.

"I believe Catherine is in the right, and that woman Minart knows something," said Blanche Ralt bluntly to David. "Why don't you get it out of her? You could if any one could. She's in love with you."

"Nonsense," said David, at once annoyed, embarrassed, and incredulous, as an Englishman usually is at any suggestion that a woman to whom he is indifferent has shown signs of a preference for him.

"You may say nonsense, but it's plain fact; the sort of fact nobody would mention but I, who pride myself on saying anything that comes into my head," said Blanche, and indeed there

was no communication too delicate for her to make to her astonished friends.

"She rather avoids me than otherwise," said David, almost angrily.

"That's a bad sign," said Mrs. Ralt, shaking her head.

"Surely it would be a worse sign if she ran after me," he retorted, laughing in spite of himself.

"Not at all; she avoids you because she's afraid to trust herself alone with you, for fear of turning soft and letting out her secret. Take my advice, get her alone, and shake it out of her."

"She has told us all she knows."

"She has not."

"You suspect her because she's a foreigner, like poor old George."

"I suspect her because nobody knows anything about her."

"The police have verified her references."

"What does that amount to? She has stayed a couple of years each in half a dozen families, learning their secrets and keeping her own," said Mrs. Ralt contemptuously. "She is deep and cunning, and she gained a great influence over poor little Philippa, who is only just clever enough to be sillier than other people, and to put her whole trust in a woman she'd never seen before because she flattered her. She tries to flatter Augusta, but it's a bit awkward for both

of them when I'm about," said Mrs. Ralt, laughing shortly. "However, her flattery has done very little for her, since Augusta has no intention of keeping her. She declares now she only got her for Philippa's sake."

"Poor woman!"

"I waste no pity on her. Poor Philippa, I say; to be taken away from her mother, and handed over to the tender mercies of a woman like that."

David groaned.

"There! I know I'm a Job's comforter. But there *is* a certain comfort too; for if I'm right, it couldn't be to her interest that Philippa should come to bodily hurt," said Mrs. Ralt, relenting. "You mustn't take to heart what I say."

"I care little enough what any one says to me," said David sadly, "but you know it was I —like the confounded ass I am—who undertook the responsibility of advising Catherine to let Philippa come here."

"Aye, did you? Well, you didn't know Augusta so well then as you do now, I'll be bound," said Mrs. Ralt.

Since that first terrible moment when she learnt that her child was lost, Catherine had hardly rested. She had spent many hours of the long summer nights, attended by the faithful terrified Roper, wandering in the streets.

"You'll kill yourself, my lady, and what good can we do?" sobbed Roper, who was old and stout, and very little suited to share these nocturnal wanderings; but nevertheless determined that her mistress should not trust herself alone in London streets after dark.

"Would you have me going tranquilly to bed, not knowing my darling's fate, or where she may be, or what may be happening to her? I should go mad the moment my head touched my pillow," said Catherine vehemently; and though Roper slept heavily in the daytime to make up for her broken repose, her mistress seemed able to exist without sleep at all; and when she fell now and then into an uneasy doze in an arm-chair, her dreams were so frightful that she woke screaming with terror, and filled with nameless apprehensions.

"It will kill her if it goes on," Roper said despairingly, yet neither she nor the others could do aught to relieve the strain.

But on the second night after little Lily's arrival, resting her tired body for a moment on the child's bed, and her head upon the child's pillow as she bade her good-night, Catherine fell suddenly asleep.

Lily, having spent a whole day in this atmosphere of unrest, and heard, it may be, from the servants many surmises not intended for her ears, had perhaps realised more clearly the gravity

of the situation, and the agony of Philippa's mother; for she had poured forth passionately, with her face hidden upon Catherine's breast, her prayer for her cousin's safe return.

She prayed aloud, as a child of her age usually does, and as the petition did not form part of her usual formula, she used language all her own; earnest, stilted, and full of quaint mistakes which would have made Catherine smile in a happier time, but now only caused her tears to flow more freely, as she followed words she could not have borne from older lips.

"God may listen to this little innocent, perhaps, though He has not listened to me," she thought. And it was during that moment's opening of her heart to consolation, as the child's voice softly murmured in her ears, that her strained nerves suddenly relaxed their tension, and sleep, deep and dreamless, overtook her tired brain.

Catherine slept, and the child waked; not daring to move, scarcely even to breathe, lest she should disturb that slumber.

"Roper said she would die if she didn't sleep; and now she has gone to sleep, so she will not die," thought Lily. "But she said some one must be always watching for Philippa. I will watch. They think me a baby, but I am not a baby, and I can lie awake as well as a grown-up person. I shall think one of my thinks until I get excited

and interested, and when one is excited and interested one never feels sleepy."

The hours of the night rolled on, and Catherine never moved, and it was not until the dawn began to grow in the sky, visible above the trees of the square through the uncurtained open window, that Lily's eyelids grew too heavy for her heroism, and closed without her own knowledge.

Dawn grew to day, the sunshine streamed through the open window, and Catherine woke, at first to peace, and then to that sudden familiar pang of recollected sorrow. She realised that she had slept through the night, wrapped in her wool dressing-gown, on the little bed which had been placed beside her own for Lily. Her start woke the child.

"I haven't been to sleep," said Lily drowsily, "at least, I didn't mean to. I saw the daylight come. I was watching, Cousin Catherine, and you went to sleep while I was saying my prayers. Do you remember?"

"I remember."

"I kept awake, thinking. One of my thinks was that you told daddy I was a comfort to you; so that he was glad he listened to me and brought me here." She stole a glance at Catherine. "Do you think that will ever come true?"

"Yes, Lily, yes, I promise it shall come true."

"Sometimes you break your promises," said Lily wistfully. "You said you'd come back—

and you didn't come back. You didn't even write. But I'm not blaming you," she added hastily. "I know grown-up people are not very good at keeping promises. Philippa *never* breaks her promises, so wherever she is I expect I shall get her letter as usual," said Lily calmly. "I told Sally to be sure and forward it."

Catherine looked startled.

"When did you get her last letter?"

"On Saturday morning. I always get it on Saturday. She writes on Friday, and I on Sunday," explained Lily. "We agreed we was to all the time she was away. But I wrote an extra to tell her I was at Shepherd's Rest, so she need not be so careful what she wrote; because at home Aunt Clara reads my letters, and so Philippa can't tell me any of her secrets like she does other times. And *you* got a letter from her too on Saturday morning, Cousin Catherine, don't you remember? Or is it too short a time ago for you to remember? You said once that old people remembered best what happened a long time ago. Only you were down at the Abbey when it came, because of poor Sir Cecil." Her voice sank to an awe-struck whisper.

"Yes, I got a letter, but Philippa did not tell me any secrets in it," said Catherine anxiously. "Think, Lily, think, my darling. Did she tell you anything—anything special in that letter?"

"Lots and lots of special things," said Lily surprised. "Because she *knew* I wouldn't have to show it to any one at Shepherd's Rest, you know. So she put 'Private,' and told me all her secrets—at least nearly all—just as if we had been talking. There was four whole sheets. I read it all alone in the porch while I ate my strawberries because Aunt Dulcinea was crying too much to come to breakfast."

"Lily, you haven't lost that letter, have you? You know where it is?"

"It's here," said Lily, and she stretched out her arm, took her Sunday frock from the post of the little bed where Catherine had slept so soundly, and lugged a thick crumpled letter from a small torn calico pocket. "I always keep her last letter in my pocket till the next one comes; but I can't show it to you, Cousin Catherine," she said reproachfully, "when I told you it was private."

"There will be nothing—I cannot believe there would be—anything," said Catherine to herself, trembling, with her eyes fixed on the letter. "But there might be—there might—Lily, you will show *me* the letter, won't you, if I promise faithfully, faithfully, not to tell any of the secrets?"

But she would not take it from the child, though she put both arms round her, and held her and her letter tightly.

"I can't, it is private," said Lily, and began to cry.

But Catherine laid her cheek against the little face, and coaxed and petted and reasoned until the poor little conscience wavered.

"If you are sure it will help to find Philippa —if you solemnly promise to forget everything in it—if you will tell her that it was your fault, that you *made* me," she gasped between her sobs. And the end of it was that she sat by, frightened and miserable, gazing with reproachful eyes while Catherine read the scrawled blotted outpourings which resembled so little Philippa's carefully indited letters to her mother.

They were very innocent secrets that Philippa had confided to her small contemporary; but expressed with the tenderness and sentiment which the young are apt to conceal, however unconsciously, from their parents and guardians, and lavish upon each other; as though authority must of necessity make full confidence impossible.

Little Lily possessed the rare gift of sympathy, besides an intelligence far beyond her years, so that, young as she was, she stood more upon a level with Philippa in her dreams and fancies than her elders could, who would have had to look back twenty years or more into the past before they could realise the point of view from which Philippa wrote:

"My own darling Lilpil,—It's glorious your being at Shepherd's Rest like we always planned.

No, of course I am not one bit jealous, it would be very odd if I was, when I am having such a splendid time. I promise you shall go on being my *most* confidential friend, just as you always have been; but of course there *are* things I couldn't possibly tell you till you're in your teens, then I will certainly tell you *everything*. Still, I've thousands of secrets I *can* tell you, and now, instead of saving them up till we meet, I can write them, as you won't have to show your letters to any one at Shepherd's Rest.

"Really my most delightful secret is that I've almost made up my mind to be an Army nurse, but don't tell any one, as you know how people always laugh at one. They wear red crosses on their arms and go to wars wherever there's fighting. Cousin David told me about them, and how some of them died from hard work in the South African War. I thought how delightful it would be if he were wounded—not badly, you know, but enough to want nursing—and was carried into a tent, and found *me* waiting in a lovely white cap and apron, to take care of him. If you like, darling, you may decide to be one too, and then we can have talks about it when we meet.

"Another secret is that I gave the sovereign granny tipped me and said I was not to waste, to an old, old man who looks very wretched, and sweeps a crossing close by here. I suppose

she could hardly call *that* wasting it. He has a long white beard and looks venerable. He said 'God bless you.' Wasn't it sweet of him? It made me feel so pleased and uncomfortable; you know the feeling. Most people give him a penny, which I think frightfully mean. Don't tell any one this, of course, they would only say he would get drunk, and on the contrary he was back again at work that very afternoon, rather to my surprise, looking wretcheder than ever. So he probably put it straight in the bank, or gave it to his wife and children. I *do* miss you, darling; though, of course, *not* so much as if I hadn't got Mme. Minart. It's quite different since she came. Cousin Augusta lets us go somewhere every day, and often never even troubles to ask where! Mme. Minart keeps a little book and puts down our expenses, and if I happen to be hungry she never minds popping into Gunter's or somewhere, and having ices, only *she* prefers brandy-cherries, which I tasted and found simply disgusting. And we go everywhere in hansoms, which, as you may suppose, is much more amusing than going in the carriage with Cousin Augusta, who used to go shopping or pay visits, and leave me sitting outside for *hours*.

"We go to matinées at the theatre, and one day we went to the Tower, and one day to the Crystal Palace, which you would have simply loved, as there is a charming stall there where you

can buy cocoa-nut candy. We had a long day there together. Oh, Lily, she is such an angel. I will tell you a secret about her, but this is quite private, remember, and I only tell you that you may know *how* noble she is. She has a poor consumptive sister who lives quite close to the Crystal Palace, and a wretched nephew who is always getting into trouble, so that she never even lets them know her address, and she says it would harm her position if people knew about them, but I am certain mummie wouldn't mind, and if she comes to live with us, as I hope, I shall persuade mummie to help them. I think they must be ungrateful beasts though, from what she says; but she is fond of them all the same, and gives all her money to keep her poor sister. Isn't that being a real heroine?"

Catherine's heart began to throb as she deciphered these words, but she read to the end of the letter before letting herself dwell upon their significance.

For Mme. Minart's full and free communications regarding her past and present career had included no mention of her relations living close to the Crystal Palace. On the contrary, she had, more than once, expressly and pathetically stated that she was alone in the world.

Catherine took the forlorn and sobbing Lily suddenly into her arms.

"Oh, my little Lily," she murmured, flushed and trembling with excitement, "if you have put the clue into our hands after all! Listen, darling, I must dress at once and go downstairs to see Uncle David, who was to be here at nine. Promise me that you will not say one word about Philippa's letter to any one but me."

"I am not likely to say a word to any one. I didn't want to tell you," said Lily aggrieved; but she was flattered too, that *her* letter should be so very important.

David Moore arrived in Belgrave Square with military exactitude as the clock struck nine, and was ushered into the morning room, where he found Catherine awaiting him.

She had copied out in her own clear writing the passage in Philippa's letter relating to Mme. Minart, and she handed it to him without delay, watching his expression anxiously as he read it twice rapidly over.

"Have you mentioned this to any one?"

"Not a soul. I thought you would take it round to Scotland Yard yourself."

"I would rather see Mme. Minart first."

"Would it not put her on her guard? Oh, David, think!" she said, trembling. "Indeed, she is a very artful woman, and — forgive me, but she convinced you of her honesty before. A man is so easily taken in," said poor Catherine;

for, though she was ready to regard with awe the superiority of the masculine intellect, she could not divest herself of the conviction which lurks in the hearts of the most simple and candid of women—that the cleverest man on earth is no match for a woman bent on deception.

"You have a right to reproach me," said David calmly, "but she will not take me in twice, Catherine. I now share all your suspicions. She *has* deceived me, for she told me she was quite alone in the world. She has also made this false statement to the police. I believe this letter would justify her arrest on suspicion; but, however that may be, it puts a weapon into our hands. Now listen"—he paused, collected himself, and spoke briefly: "our object is to find Philippa as quickly as possible, and if Mme. Minart knows where she is, she can help us a great deal more effectively than any one else. Therefore I suggest that you go quietly and bring her to me here, and leave me to try first persuasion and then threats. If I fail this time, I send to Scotland Yard, and hand her over to the authorities, taking care she has no opportunity of warning her relatives in the meantime. If I succeed, I will not lose sight of her for a moment—but the fewer people we take into our confidence until we know"—his eyes darkened—"where Philippa is and what has happened during this past week, the better."

Mme. Minart obeyed Catherine's summons without delay, and attended Colonel Moore in the morning room with alacrity.

Her appearance was attractive as usual; her black dress the perfection of neatness, with a glossy turned-down collar and a smart white bow to relieve the darkness of her brown throat.

Her hat she would have described truly as *très chic*, for that too was turned up at one side with another bewitching bow, which rested on her raven hair, and contrasted with her bright dark eyes and olive complexion.

"M. le Colonel desires to speak to me?" she said very sweetly. "I am always at the service of M. le Colonel. I was about to walk round the square with Miladi's maid, to exercise Miladi's pug. You know, monsieur, that I go not anywhere alone? No. There is an *espionage—surveillance*. I am suspected of I know not what. Not by Monsieur le Colonel, *bien entendu*, but by others."

"That is true," said David sternly. "When others suspected you, I believed."

"It was like you," she sighed. "Do you think I am insensible? Believe me, I am grateful."

She stole a glance at his face, but the gloom of his expression frightened her. She cast down her eyes and waited.

"How much gratitude you felt for my credulity I cannot tell, but that you have deceived me I

have just learnt," said David. "I do not wonder, madame, that you cannot look me in the face."

Mme. Minart moved uneasily, but she did not raise her eyes.

"There may be more reasons than one," she murmured, half softly, half defiantly, "why a woman should not care to—to look Colonel Moore in the face."

It was now David's turn to feel uneasy; for he recalled Mrs. Ralt's observations, and became exceedingly embarrassed at the recollection.

"There can be no good reason but one," he said rather hurriedly. "And I prefer to believe that one. It is that Mme. Minart is ashamed to have deceived a friend."

"A friend! Are you my friend?" Mme. Minart's voice was reproachful though sweet.

"Have I not proved myself a friend?" said David, reddening. "You said just now that when others suspected you, I did not."

"Ah, yes; that is true," she sighed. "But you are noble—generous." Her eyes no longer avoided him, but softened and brightened with a very eloquent expression of feeling; the colour glowed in her olive face, and she looked exceedingly handsome.

"If you thought so, why did you not trust me?"

"I do not know what you mean," she said, in some agitation. "Of what do you suspect me?"

"I do not suspect, I *know*. You told me you

were alone in the world, without relatives, without family. And it was not true. You have a sister—a nephew—whom you help, who are, at all events, partly dependent upon you—who live close to you here in London."

Mme. Minart turned white. There was a pause, during which David regarded her sternly; then she spoke, but with difficulty, as though her lips were dry.

"And if I have—if I have denied the existence of these miserables for their own sakes—that they might not be mixed up in this affair—what of that?" she said faintly.

"That you have done—whatever you have done—for their sakes I am willing to believe," said David with quick compassion. "Their dependence upon you supplies the motive. You wanted money. There could be no other reason. Mme. Minart, what have you done with Philippa?"

"You desire me to accuse myself that you may hand me over to the police—to the prison," she said with angry tears.

"Madame," said David curtly, "I am very little used to dealing with blackmailers. If you were a man I would have the truth out of you first, and then hand you over to the police without a moment's hesitation. But you are a woman, and, rightly or wrongly, I cannot bring myself to be harsh to a woman."

She raised her dark eyes at this and looked at

him through her tears; perhaps she thought the pleading sweetness of that look might soften him further yet. She knew that she was handsome, and she had discovered that the Colonel was susceptible to beauty and humility.

Whether this were so or not, David drew a step closer to her side and spoke more gently.

"Why did you not tell me the truth the other day, and save us all these days of suspense and misery? If you had told me you were in trouble I would have helped you."

"You would have helped me?" she said almost inaudibly. "How could I know that?"

"I am not a rich man," said David, "but I have enough and to spare—to help a woman who is in trouble."

"Monsieur," she said indignantly, "what would you have thought if I had asked you for money?"

David looked at her steadily. "No evil—and you know it. You, who tell me you are a judge of character, know it perfectly."

"Yes," she said, drooping her dead, "you are right, I know it."

Then she sat still and cried, putting up her slender gloved hands to hide her face.

Like most men, David disliked exceedingly the sight of a woman's tears. He stood for a moment regarding Mme. Minart impatiently, and wondering how he should proceed. It was now almost certain that the existence of her relatives had

everything to do with the disappearance of Philippa, and that their discovery, when this clue should be placed in the hands of the police, was only a question of time. But he felt the advisability of conciliating the Frenchwoman, and persuading her if possible to tell him the truth at once. The mention of the nephew had filled David with vague anxiety, and not a little anger. What had happened to Philippa? He felt that if he could, with Mme. Minart's aid, bring her home at once, secretly and safely, without further police intervention, it would save poor Catherine something—a great deal.

He said "Poor Catherine!" to himself, scarcely daring to think of Philippa at all; for the bare thought of the woman-child—of her beauty and helplessness—the victim of blackmailers—a prisoner or worse—drove him to fury, and of what avail was fury now?

Mme. Minart must have divined something of his feelings when she glanced suddenly up, and saw his dark face lowering over her.

"What have you done with the child?" said David, answering the look with anger in his voice.

"Ah, monsieur," she said, putting up her hand, "do not take that tone. Threats are nothing to me—nothing. But when you speak gently to me—when you talk of being my friend—or helping me," she sobbed, "it is then I can deny

you nothing. I am a fool, I know it. But a woman is sometimes the slave of her feelings, of her impulses."

"Help me now," he said, "and I swear that whatever you have done I will stand your friend. Look at me and believe me."

"Believe you!" she said passionately. "Could I doubt *you?* You said truly that I was too good a judge of human nature."

"Take me to Philippa."

"Wait—wait—let me think." She put her hand to her forehead, but he took it and held it.

"I do not want you to think. To think means with you to plot and scheme and plan," he said imperiously. "Look at me, and tell me now, this moment, the truth."

"You will stand my friend?"

"I have said so."

"What does that mean?"

"That I will help you to the best of my power to escape punishment for what you have done, if you will help me at once to bring Philippa, safe and sound, home to her mother—that I will give you a sum of money—what you want, in reason —I suppose it is money you want——"

"Yes, yes, I want money; but there is something dearer to a woman than money. You despise me," she sobbed.

"No, no," said David, "I will believe you were tempted by them."

"I was tempted, but not as you think. It was my plan, my scheme; they are incapable—helpless—they have no brains. Oh, what am I saying? I am betraying myself with every word. I will tell you nothing, *nothing* here, where every one is my enemy, or a spy on me. If you are my friend, take me away from this place, and I will tell you all."

"You shall come away at once," said David, and he scrawled a hasty line in his pocket-book. "I will leave a message for her mother."

"No, no! I trust no woman. What are you writing?" she said, sobbing and suspicious.

He held it up to her without a word.

"*Do not take any one into your confidence. I am following up this clue with every hope of complete success. Await news. May possibly telephone.*"

"*Je vous demande pardon, monsieur,*" said Mme. Minart humbly.

He gave her no time to reflect or resist further, but rang the bell and desired Pilkington to carry the note, which he sealed, to Catherine, and then he left the house with Mme. Minart, who was still visibly agitated.

In the square he recognised the detective who was watching the house, and said a word to him. The man nodded and touched his cap.

"What did you say to that man?"

"Do you doubt me again? I told him not

to leave his post—that I would be responsible for you."

"Where are you going?"

"To Victoria Station."

"You know where she is? Then why—why did you ask my help?" she said faintly.

"I do not know the exact address," said David calmly.

She took a slip of paper from her purse and handed it to him.

"You will see that I trust you."

"Is this your sister's house?"

"It is called hers."

"Is Philippa with her?"

"Yes, yes."

"And safe—well?"

"You think only of her," said Mme. Minart, bursting into fresh tears. "She is strong as a lion. How should her health have suffered in one short week? My sister is not a monster."

She sobbed so violently that the passers-by turned their heads and looked indignantly at David.

"For Heaven's sake control yourself. I will ask you no more questions," he said impatiently.

"I will tell you all—all another time, but not now. Have pity on me now," she sobbed; "you will be with her, monsieur, in an hour. What more can you ask?"

CHAPTER XVIII

THE cab passed rows and rows of suburban villas, standing each in its own narrow plot of ground; some old, some newly built, some unfinished and surrounded by scaffolding and stacks of bricks and heaps of mortar; then came eligible building sites, already partitioned off with palings, each to be let or sold, and finally a shady road, where some half-dozen shabby houses of a much earlier date stood, each in its own garden, in the shelter of well-grown trees and screened by tall straggling hedges and high walls of yellow brick.

Before the gate of the last house the driver stopped, and, jumping from his box, opened the door.

"I hope you'll give me a job back, sir?" he said civilly, to David; "this is the other end of nowhere; you ought to have gone to the low-level station to begin with——"

"All right," said David; "wait here."

An overgrown path led past tangled borders, where roses strove with nettles, and lilies were choked with bindweed.

"We have no gardener," said Mme. Minart,

in subdued tones of apology as they reached the front door.

Crooked and broken blinds flapped against windows cracked, dirty, and curtainless; the paint had long ago blistered or peeled off the woodwork.

"It is so cheap—they let us have it for almost nothing," she faltered, as though she were looking at the place anew with his eyes; "the last years of the lease—and it is to be pulled down. We have paid no attention to the front of the house, it is beyond our power to mend—and it faces north."

David tugged at a rusty handle which responded with the echoing clang of a bell rung in an empty house.

"Is there any one here?" he said; "it looks as though no one were here." His glance was so full of gloomy suspicion that she quailed, and he took her suddenly by the arm.

"Are you deceiving me again? Are you playing me some trick? If you are——"

"No, no," she said, trembling. "Ah, monsieur, believe me, I cannot bear your anger. They are here, indeed they are here. But they live on the other side, in only one or two rooms. We have so little furniture; but the garden at the back is good for my sister, who is ill. Come round to the other side. You have no need to hold me thus. How could I get away from you, and did I not

bring you here myself?" she said with a laugh that was half a sob.

But he held her, nevertheless—so full of doubt and anger that he scarce knew that he did so—as they went round to the side of the house, where a green door in a wall shut off the front drive from the garden. She sought and found a rusty key which was hidden in a convenient nook, unlocked and pushed open the creaking door.

Once on the south side of the house they had no need to ring, for a French window stood open under a wooden balcony; they entered an empty room which had once evidently been the drawing-room of the villa, for the marble mantelpiece was elegantly carved, and the ceiling wreathed with painted flowers.

Mme. Minart hurried him into the narrow hall and gave a tremulous call.

"Eugénie!"

The name echoed forlornly up the carpetless stair.

She opened the opposite door.

The room which now offered itself to their view was furnished plainly as a living-room. There was a small highly polished cooking stove, an easy chair, and a round table with a cloth.

It was spotlessly clean and in perfect order, but had the air of not having been recently used, and something in its aspect appeared to strike

Mme. Minart with uneasiness. She glanced around, as though missing familiar objects.

"It looks as though some one had left. As if things had been folded up and put away," said David.

"How can she have left? I tell you she is ill. It is for that I brought her here. For the air; for the garden," said Mme. Minart. "She does not stir from this place—my sister. She must be upstairs."

She hurried out, and David, following, caught sight of a letter conspicuously placed.

He took it up and held it out.

"This is addressed to you."

Simultaneously Mme. Minart perceived in the little dark vestibule a small heap of letters and advertisements, which lay upon the floor below the slit in the door where a letter-box should have been.

She gathered them up in a dazed way, and brought them to the light, with a kind of stifled exclamation.

"I do not understand," she said; "wait a moment, wait a moment. But this is the letter I sent her, and it has not been opened. What has happened?"

"Read this one and see," said David, impatiently, and he gave her the note addressed to herself.

She tore open the envelope, took out a half-

sheet of foreign note-paper, covered with fine French writing.

When she had read it, every vestige of colour faded from her face and lips; she looked at him with horror unspeakable in her eyes.

"*Bon Dieu! qu'est-ce que j'ai fait, qu'est-ce que j'ai fait?*" she muttered.

"What have you done?" cried David, for she stood motionless, as though struck with horror. "For God's sake tell me the worst and be done with it. Where have they taken her? What has happened to her?"

"They—they have not taken her," said Mme. Minart, with dry lips; "she—she brought them a letter—from me—that morning. The letter told my sister to—to detain her—that I was coming that day, in a few hours. And my sister did not wait—she did not wait," screamed Mme. Minart; "she went away and never got my letter saying I was not coming. Oh, that I should have trusted to a fool—a coward!"

"What do I care about your sister—where is Philippa?" he said.

She put the letter into his hand and ran to the staircase.

"Let me go first. Oh, my God! let me go first—if she is—there," gasped Mme. Minart. "It will kill me—and I deserve—I deserve—to die."

David glanced at the scrawl in his hand, and

the glance told him nothing. He did not wait to decipher it, but thrust it into his pocket, and followed Mme. Minart as she hurried, without pausing to look back, to the third or attic floor of the villa.

Here was a single door facing the stairs, and before it she paused, and pointed out to him with a ghastly expression that it was heavily bolted upon the outside.

She put her hand upon the bolt, and her strength suddenly failed her; she leant against the wall, fainting, and it was David who drew back the bolt.

"Is any one here?" he said, and pushing open the door, entered.

The room was a large, bare attic, with a sloping roof and a barred opaque skylight. Opposite him a door, partly open, displaying a small bath-room; in the corner next that door stood a low narrow bed, and beside the bed, a chair, holding a water-jug and an empty tumbler.

David's heart seemed to contract, and for a brief second a mist of horror darkened his eyes.

"A blue dress and a black straw hat," he found himself muttering—"a blue dress and a black straw hat. Oh, Catherine—Catherine——"

The hat lay on the table, and on the bed a figure in a blue dress—motionless, as though sleeping. The clearly cut face on the pillow, so wasted as to be almost unrecognisable, was Philippa's face.

David turned and looked at Mme. Minart as she stood shivering in the doorway, and at his look she cowered afresh and fell upon her knees, sobbing violently.

With stern set face he crossed the room and bent over the motionless figure.

She saw him start, and almost screamed aloud, but restrained herself in terror; for Philippa's great blue eyes opened, and her voice uttered David's name faintly, but quite clearly.

"Yes, Philippa; yes, my darling," he said, in a voice that trembled with all the tenderness and wrath and pity that was pent up in his great heart. "It is all right now. I am here. I have come to take care of you."

He knelt by the bed, and took the transparent hand. She seemd to smile, and closed her eyes.

There was not a tinge of colour in the sunken face; the hollows of the eyes were enormously enlarged, the features pinched and sharpened—her deathly aspect filled him with terror.

Mme. Minart uttered a suppressed call, and David rose from his knees and went to the doorway.

"For God's sake pull yourself together," he whispered, passionately; "fetch me some brandy and send the cabman for a doctor. Don't lose a minute. I can't leave her. It's your best chance to undo the work you've done."

"I never meant it—not this—not this," gasped Mme. Minart, but her white despair had given

place to hope, and her native energy shone through her tears. "I will go—I will fly—but listen—she is alive, and though she has not eaten all these days, there has been water—it is laid on—there—one can live many days with water, thank God. Look, monsieur, she must not see me, she must not have any emotion. It is food—milk that she wants—not the doctor. Oh, my God! wait but a moment, I will bring you milk, brandy—you may trust me now. I would die to bring her back to life."

She sped with noiseless haste downstairs, and a moment later she had despatched the cabman in one direction, while she herself ran in another to the back door of the nearest house, and begged a little milk and other necessaries.

In less than five minutes she stood again, breathless, on the threshold of the attic, with a glass of milk and a flask of brandy in her hands, some bread, and a teaspoon.

"Give her no more, no more than a spoonful, a very little. And then—wait—wait," she whispered vehemently, and wrung her hands as he took it across to the bedside. "No bread yet—I am afraid. Oh, that I might do it myself; but I dare not. The sight of me might kill her if she knows; yet what can a man do for her—and I here, who know all that should be done."

But David was by no means so destitute of nursing experience as she had imagined, and

when she had watched him administer a teaspoonful of the nourishment, she grew calmer, and, bethinking herself, ran downstairs again.

David sat beside Philippa, watching the death-like face, and praying dumbly that the doctor would hasten his coming; for he could hardly feel any pulse at all in the little wasted wrist he held.

At intervals he administered a teaspoonful of the milk and brandy, and hoped that some was swallowed; but he could discern no motion of the throat, and she seemed unconscious or sleeping.

Once the blue eyes opened again and were fixed in wonder upon his face. The perfect calm of the expression made him at one moment hopeful, at another fearful.

Was it only that she was relieved to know that help had come, or was she resigned to death?

He forced himself to smile reassuringly in return for that wondering look; but this time she gave no answering smile, only sank away, as it were, into another death-like slumber.

He had time for many thoughts as he sat there, holding her hand in his; not daring to move, forced to inaction, while he longed feverishly to be despatching messengers hither and thither, to hasten the coming of help, of the doctor, of her mother.

But he was obliged to trust all to the woman

who had brought Philippa, whether of fell design or not, to this pass; and to remain at his post in silence through the long bright hours of the summer morning.

He had time for many thoughts.

He saw, as in a vision, the beautiful girl, scarcely more than a child, as he had seen her first on the cedar-shadowed lawn of the old-fashioned Devonshire garden, and then, again, upon the sea-shore, leaning against the rocks with her white feet lapped by the blue water, and her bright hair blowing in the wind. He thought of the half shy, half stately maiden, moving later through the London ball-room, distinguished by her noble features and bearing, and by that unmistakable bloom of country freshness. "Like a rose," thought David, reflecting that this ancient simile was after all the best.

And now the motionless, waxen face lay on the pillow, seeming that of an older woman altogether than the maiden Philippa; so sunken, so changed was its outline, so sharply prominent the ivory features.

What days and nights of lonely anguish and suffering had this child lived through, to be changed thus? He dared not think.

As David sat there the very aspect of the room which had been Philippa's prison told him a story that filled him with unavailing fury, and

brought tears of mingled rage and pity to his eyes.

It was almost an empty room, containing only a cheap washstand, a chair or two, a few pegs driven into the wall, and the deal table whereon lay the hat which had been described in so many useless advertisements. In the wall a little square opening showed a small box-lift, just large enough to hold a very small tray; but though the tray was there, it was empty.

There was a fireplace, but no fire-irons. One of the pegs had been worked out of its place, and there were marks round the barred skylight which showed that Philippa had made frantic unavailing efforts to force it open; the broken peg lay on the floor beneath. The leg of a chair had been used as a hammer, and the stout door of the attic was battered all over with marks; the poor child had made some efforts to break out of her prison before she grew too weak or too hopeless.

He tried to banish the vision which would rise before him of Philippa alone, crying, praying, starving, throughout that long and terrible week; of hope giving place to despair; of her dragging herself from her bed to fill the water-jug for the last time, and sinking back at last resigned to die; too weak, too exhausted to struggle further, her face so plainly betrayed that she had reached that final stage of meekness.

The thought was so unbearable that he started to his feet, feeling the silence and waiting intolerable, when her life was trembling in the balance.

"Cousin David."

"Philippa, my little Philippa. Oh, thank God! your voice sounds stronger."

"Don't go," she said feebly, and tried to lift her hand.

"I am not going, I will never leave you," said David, almost incoherent between joy and anxiety. He kissed the little hand, and about his heart there crept a sudden warmth and passion of tenderness for the helpless creature whom it had been given to him to rescue and succour, and who seemed in turn to cling to him.

"Try—try to swallow a little milk, Philippa. There, there. Why, that is right and brave, my darling. You've taken the whole spoonful, and another. Wait only one moment, we mustn't go too fast."

He trembled with hope, perceiving that the hollow eyes were fixed eagerly upon the bread. There was a little sound outside, and the frail fingers he held seemed to tighten their hold.

"It is the doctor at last," said David, in great relief. "You will not mind, Philippa?"

But the blue eyes were turned to the door, and it was not the doctor who came softly into the room, but Catherine, in her black gown, with her pale face composed and smiling.

She was carrying a cup and tray, which she put down on the little table, on her way to Philippa's bedside.

"Mamma," said Philippa.

'I am here, my darling!"

David held his breath, terrified of the possible effects of emotion upon Philippa in her weakness; but to his relief she displayed none, and seemed to take her mother's entry as the most natural thing in the world, and Catherine was so guarded or had been so carefully prepared that she betrayed no sign of the shock that her child's appearance must have given.

David remembered with some shame that he had thought indulgently of Catherine's weakness and softness of character.

There was no weakness to be discerned in the woman whose arm at present supported her child, and whose steady hand administered nourishment from the cup she bade him hold. There was no doubt now of the eagerness with which it was swallowed.

"No more for the present," said Catherine, beneath her breath, and she signed to him to remove the cup.

He saw Philippa fall asleep more naturally in her mother's soft arms, before he stole away in obedience to another look from Catherine, which seemed to bid him leave her alone with her child.

"She won't want me any more, now," he thought, sadly, and then was surprised at his own sadness; for how was it possible that Philippa should want him, comparatively a stranger as he was, now that her mother was by her side?

CHAPTER XIX

OUTSIDE the door of the attic David found a little valise and handbag, and a pile of clean warm linen and blankets beside a small table covered with necessaries for a sick-room; even to a bunch of roses, evidently gathered from the neglected garden and arranged in a glass of water. He realised that Mme. Minart had been working while he had been watching.

The thought of her brought a frown to his brow as he descended.

He found her in the living-room, bending over a bubbling saucepan on the cooking-stove.

A small fire was burning, the kettle was singing, and the window stood wide-open to the brightness of the summer day.

Mme. Minart had removed her outdoor things and donned a snowy apron. She looked so orderly, so trim, so busy, that it was not possible to think of her as a criminal; but when she perceived David's tall figure in the doorway, she uttered a little cry and clasped her hands.

"She is better! I watched through the door; she took the warm egg and milk I had prepared.

She will recover, monsieur; believe me, she will recover."

"By God's grace," said David, roughly. "Did you send for the doctor, as I bade you?"

"I have sent. But I sent first for her mother," said Mme. Minart, breathlessly. "What could the doctor do more than we have done? I bade the cabman telephone. I wrote it down who he was to ask for, and the message, and gave him a sovereign. He had seemed stupid, but when he saw the gold he proved quick and willing. He telephoned in your name, and it was Philippa's mother who answered; she was waiting as you bade. He told her the child had been found, and was ill; that she was to say nothing to any one, but to take your motor and come. I promised him more money if he should be discreet and quick. He brought me all I wanted, and then he went for the doctor, who was out; then to another further off, and so on. At last we have a message one is coming. When Lady Adelstane came, I told her—she is very quick, she understood. I fell on my knees and told her," said Mme. Minart, suppressing a sob. "She sent the motor back to town to fetch the maid, Roper, and bade the chauffeur hold his tongue. The cabman had already got most of the things that are wanted."

"You thought of everything," he said, momentarily softened.

"Everything that could help to undo—what I had done—in my folly and senselessness," she said trembling. "You have read my letter?"

"What letter? How do you suppose I should have time to think of your letters, at such a moment?"

"You must, then, believe that I am a monster," she said, bursting into tears. "Monsieur, I have been foolish and wicked. I was tempted as you said, but not to this. Believe me, you are not more filled with horror, with grief, than I."

"I am in no mood to listen to your self-reproaches after what I have seen upstairs," he said sternly.

His expression recalled the look he had given her after the first shock of beholding Philippa; and she trembled now as she had trembled then, but without losing her self-command.

"Yet you promised to stand my friend," she said, faintly.

"I said I would stand your friend," said David, gloomily, "if you brought me to her, and by God's grace you did so—just in time. But if I had known what you had done——"

"But I never meant to do it. Ah, can't you see it was a mistake—a dreadful mistake?" she said, white to the lips, as she stood beside the table facing him.

"Aye, a mistake that, for aught we know yet, may cost her life," he said bitterly, "and might

have cost her reason. Who knows how far she will ever be herself again, if she recovers at all?"

"She will recover, monsieur—she will recover. And it is not mercy I ask, but justice. I deserve all you can desire to inflict upon me," she said with a certain dignity. "But my sister's letter will prove to you that, though I am guilty, I am not so guilty as you believe."

David pulled the letter out of his pocket, but her impatience caused her to explain the contents more quickly than he could decipher the faint flourishing scratches of the writing.

"Monsieur, it is from my sister; she is a widow, ill, weak, poor—and her son is a *vaurien*. Always since his birth has he been a trouble and expense. But they are all I have in the world—which will explain—I do what I can. Always he lost his situation in France; his father's family, who are also poor, will do no more for him. At last I found something in London——" She hesitated and drooped her head. "Of what matter if I tell you now? The situation of which I speak was a servant's. He was a *valet-de-chambre*—the work suited him, the pay was not bad, and he had but little time to trouble his mother, while yet he could from time to time come and see her. I had also the happiness, which has turned out no happiness, to have my sister here, where for the sake of her health it was better she should live than in London. I found this house a bargain incredible; it was not worth the owner's while

to look for a tenant who would ask for repairs. There are now but two years to run; and the house has a bad name"—she dropped her voice.

"What do you mean?"

"That room upstairs," she said, faltering, "had been occupied by a former tenant, who was at times mentally afflicted, who—but of what use, monsieur, to enter into the history of a dead man? My sister, who is nervous, found out the story, though she speaks but little English—and reproached me. She is of those who reproach always and are grateful never," said Mme. Minart bitterly; "but what matter? I have adored my sister, monsieur; shall it end because she grows ill and unreasonable? On the contrary, I comfort myself with the hope that she may recover, and be once more to me the angel of former days. I took the house in her name; I spent my savings upon these things that you see —that are mine"—she waved her hand rather proudly round the room—"but you will understand, monsieur, that I did not give them my address. I would not trust Jules, who might have visited me—and my sister entreated not to know lest he should question her. She could refuse him nothing. Ah, monsieur! when he was little all went well; I made money, I helped them, we were happy. But since Jules grew up there has been no comfort. Whatever I have given—it has never been enough."

In the midst of his anger David pitied this woman, and she was quick to observe the softening of his expression.

"Ah, monsieur," she said, passionately, "do not believe me so bad! I have worked hard all my life. I have been honest—that is, enough honest—all my life; and reflect to what it has led me. Poverty, struggles, anxiety always, sometimes despair; and my sister, loved always, whose faults arise but from her malady, dying before my eyes. When they had been settled here two years, my situation, where I had made incredible efforts to please, failed me. I tasted for the first time the horror of being without occupation. I said to myself then, "You who are clever, who are full of resource, why can you not make your fortune with one *coup?* You who have brains, will you starve among fools because you are afraid to use them?" I do not defend myself. I tell you the truth. It was thus I argued. Then I obtained this post in Belgrave Square. But the thought was ever present with me of the time when I should no longer be able to please—of the moment when my sister's illness, which is in our family, might also be mine. My father and mother died thus, and my little brother."

He could not refrain from a word and look of sympathy; but she hurried on, scarcely speaking above a whisper.

"Miladi boasted always of the expectations of this young girl, so precious to a great family, and I thought, if one could hide her—this treasure—for a little while, what reward would they not offer to get her back? Then I thought of that room—how easy it would be to keep her there—how solitary the house—how that no one knew of my sister. I went to see her and I talked of it to her. We agreed it would be very easy. I told her the reward would be large, and spoke of a fortune for Jules, of a house and garden in our own country. But we had no thought, no wish, to harm Philippa."

"No wish to harm her, and you would send her to the house where this scoundrel lived with his sick mother? A young girl, helpless—undefended!"

"My faith, monsieur, had there been the possibility of an encounter between those two, it is Jules whom I should have pitied!" said Mme. Minart, scornfully. "She has a character, that young girl. She is strong of mind and body. What would she have had to do with him—weak, sickly, small, and a coward? He would but have aroused her ridicule, her contempt. Besides, he has but few holidays. He was not likely to be at home. Ah, monsieur, believe me, I had no designs of this kind when I persuaded Philippa to come here; I believed she would be as safe in the care of my sister as in her mother's house."

"How did you persuade her to come here?"

"I won her affection and gained her confidence. Miladi tired of her company and she was always with me. Then I made my plan. I told her the secret of my home, and when we went to the Crystal Palace I took her there that she might know the way. But yet I hesitated. Then came suddenly the news of the death. When I met Roper on the stairs and she told me this, the morning after the ball, I saw that my opportunity would be gone. That she would leave London; that I might be left behind. Of what use to trust to the affection, the promises of a child? She would find a thousand flatterers now where she had but one, and forget me in her new importance. I took my resolution in haste. I persuaded Roper not to go to her room, and secretly I went myself and woke her. I told her that I had bad news; that my sister was in trouble, that a word from me would save her, and that Miladi would not let me go. I beg of her in the name of our friendship to take a letter and give it into my sister's own hands. Or rather," said Mme. Minart, shrugging her shoulders, "I led her to make this offer, poor child, and she did so, on condition she may confess her action afterwards to her mother. This soothes her conscience and my fears. I tell her she will be back before she is missed, and beg her to go without waiting to speak to any one. Being

young and quick, and with good luck to aid her, she slipped out unobserved while the household is all gaping downstairs round the groom who brings the news, and thus she heard no word of what had happened."

"Then she does not know—but, of course, she can't know," said David.

"She knows nothing. The letter she carried told my sister to put our plan into effect—to detain her as we had agreed by taking her to that room which lent itself so well to our purpose, under pretence of giving her something for me—and to lock her in; and that I would myself be with her before night. This I said because I knew that my sister, though willing to obey me, was weak and frightened, and that the thought of my coming would give her courage to carry out my instructions. But I posted immediately, under pretence of running into the square to look for Philippa, a letter for my sister to get that night explaining that I could not come or even write for a few days; repeating my instructions, and adding that I would come as soon as it was possible with safety. I enclosed a note which I told her would calm the apprehensions of the poor little prisoner, and which was to be sent up to her in the dinner-lift with her food, which I even enjoined," said Mme. Minart, with a melancholy smile, "was to be of the best, though there was little need to tell my sister that."

"What did you write to Philippa?"

"Something, you may be sure, of appeal to the romance of a young girl, to her love and her faith in me. I urged her to be patient until I should come and release her. I hinted at a danger from which I had rescued her. Of what matter, since she never received the letter? It was enclosed with this which my sister never received."

"You mean she locked up Philippa as you desired, and, believing you would be there in a few hours, ran away and left her?"

"The letter you hold will explain. Jules had been turned out of his place and threatened by his master. He came home in a great fright to his mother, and confessed that there were other things which might be found out now that he had left. In two words, monsieur—he was a thief. She packed their things and resolved to fly to France with him at once. Just as they were starting—came Philippa!"

"And they determined to go all the same, leaving her helpless, locked up in an empty house?"

"You see what she says. Feeble, changeable, frightened, and ungrateful as she always was," said Mme. Minart, in vehement scorn.

Translated, the end of the letter ran thus:

"*I have done as you told me. But I will have no more to do with your scheme. You need not blame Jules, for you are as bad as he. I will not*

wait for your return or be forced to stay here. We are going at once. My husband's father will not refuse to take us in until something can be decided; write to his house at Aumont."

"This she left on the table, and so went; and never got my letter to say I could not come. She is a fool, but she, too, had no intention of doing this great wrong," said Mme. Minart.

"And how did you ever dream you would get away unwatched? How long did you think it would have been possible to keep the place of her hiding secret?"

"Monsieur, I had thought of many schemes—of what use to explain them?—of course there is always risk." There was a gleam of excitement in Mme. Minart's eyes which betrayed that the thought of the risk would not have deterred her action. "This I did not foresee, that I should be watched; I thought I had made it impossible that I should be suspected, and also I counted on the fear of scandal. Since a young girl was in question, I believed the family would not permit of advertisement. In all these things my calculations were deceived; and yet, had my sister not failed me, I believe my plan would have succeeded—but for you."

The colour mounted into her dark face; she stood before him, trembling and suppliant, with her hands nervously clasped.

"You promised to help—to defend me," she

said almost inaudibly. "I do not ask it, monsieur. I have done enough of wrong to this child. A wrong I never meant, but nevertheless it was I who condemned her to a prison so terrible. I will do what I can to make amends. No breath of doubt must be allowed to rest upon her. I, who speak to you, am not ignorant of the world. The part I have played must for her sake be made known, but——"

David avoided the pleading gaze she fixed upon his face; his expression was very gloomy and undecided. He did not forget his promise, but the thought of the victim of this woman's plot, lying helpless upstairs, caused him to regret it very heartily at this moment. He saw beside endless difficulties in the way of its fulfilment.

The sudden clang of the door-bell relieved his embarrassment, and, with an instantaneous change of tone and manner, Mme. Minart flew to the door.

"The doctor!" she exclaimed.

The doctor made his excuses for a delay unavoidable, listened with sympathetic surprise to David's brief explanation, and was conducted upstairs.

It seemed to poor Colonel Moore's impatience a very long time before he came down again. He forgot Mme. Minart's very existence, and moved restlessly about the empty house, listening to every sound, and conjecturing a thousand complications to himself.

"You were only just in time," said the doctor, gravely.

"But it is in time?"

"I think and hope so, thanks to her youth and health and a fine constitution. But the exhaustion is excessive—probably result of emotion and terror as well as starvation. Good God, what an infamous thing, and this is the twentieth century!" The doctor's face worked with indignation.

Mme. Minart stood motionless by the table listening, a model of neatness and good looks in her black gown, white apron, and snowy collar. The doctor's approving glance noted her in the midst of his emotion, and noted also the order of the room and the dainty muslin curtains of the open window.

"I hope some one will be brought to book for this. Of course I've read all about the case in the papers. You've given notice to the police? Or can I be of help?"

"I'm going to settle all about that now," said David. "Is she too weak to be moved?"

"Couldn't stand it yet. I'm sending in a trained nurse to assist Lady Adelstane. Skilled nursing is absolutely essential. She shall bring all that is required with her."

"Everything that is wanted can be sent for," said David. "I'll get my servant down, and an old confidential maid is coming."

"Aye, so Lady Adelstane told me. A woman who can make beef-tea, and hold her tongue."

"I make at this moment," said Mme. Minart in a hoarse voice, "with some fillet I have sent for, a *bouillon* as good as your English servants could cook."

"I'll be bound it is," said the doctor, drily. "Well, the fewer people about the better. Keep her absolutely quiet. I'm afraid the reporters won't be long finding you out."

"I'll look after them. We may count on your discretion?"

"Nobody will get a word out of me. Now I won't delay another moment in finding the nurse. I have given full directions to Lady Adelstane, and she would like you to go up presently."

David saw him out of the hall-door, and hastened upstairs, where he found Catherine standing by the open door of the attic.

"She's better, and she has asked for you twice," said the soft voice.

He wondered at the calm brightness of her face.

Catherine had her child safe in her own care at last; and there was such peace in the thought, after the agonising suspense of the last eight days, that there was actually no room for anxiety in her heart, though she had been so often anxious with far less cause.

Her mind was tranquil, full of thankfulness and joy. Her child had been given back to her,

helpless, needing her utmost care; and that was all that Catherine thought of just now.

"Philippa is restless, afraid you had gone away without seeing her again," said Catherine, softly. "You must see her for a moment, but not let her talk. David"—she put her little hand gently into his—"I cannot speak to you of what you have done now."

"Not now—nor ever," he said. She shook her head and smiled.

"I can only bear to think," she said without faltering, "of the things of the moment, of what she wants now. And—and, David, I leave it all to you—to tell Lady Sarah and George, and to stop the search. Only let no one come and disturb us here."

"Leave it all to me," said David. He followed her into the attic as noiselssly as he could, and was astonished by the changes already wrought by Catherine.

The aspect of the room had been altered as far as possible. The blue dress and black hat were put out of sight, and the high staring barred window with its open ventilator was shaded. The roses stood on the little table, which was now covered with a white cloth. The bed was no longer a tumbled couch, but white and smooth. Philippa rested amid snowy sheets and pillows, with hair softly brushed off a brow refreshed by cool sponging.

She looked more like herself in spite of the terrible emaciation, and a faint colour showed in her sunken cheeks as David tiptoed into the room.

"She wants to thank you," said Catherine, interpreting her look and speaking in a low, cheerful tone. "But I've told her we can't have any talking until to-morrow, so she may just smile at you, and then go to sleep like a good child."

David took the nerveless hand very gently in his own and bent down and kissed it reverently.

"You'll make haste and get well, Philippa," he muttered, not knowing very well what to say; and bending again, just caught a little murmur:

"You won't go away?"

"I should think not," he said, cheerily. "I'm sending for my things, and I'm going to mount guard here day and night, to be at hand in case I'm wanted. And old Roper will be here in a minute or two, you know, ready to make gallons of beef-tea, and all the doctor wants you to have, that you may get quite strong again."

She tried to smile, but her lips quivered in her weakness and the tears welled into the great blue eyes. David dared not stay; he kissed her hand again and smiled encouragingly, and went away, but this time with a warm feeling of comfort, almost triumph, about his heart; for he could not help feeling that it was to him Philippa

looked as her deliverer, and that, though she had her mother, she yet seemed to want him too, a little, after all.

Downstairs the newly wound clock ticked loudly over the mantelpiece of the bright stove, and the fresh air of the summer afternoon blew in through the wide-open window; but the little sitting-room was empty.

A sheet of paper, with a weight upon it, was placed conspicuously in the centre of the table. On the paper was written, in a clear and pointed hand:

"To M. le Colonel Moore.

"I go to give notice to the police, and to place myself at their disposal. This will at once relieve you of an embarrassment, and convince you of the sincerity of my regrets. M. MINART."

CHAPTER XX

"Of course I'm not so upset as I was last week," sobbed Augusta. "It's absurd to expect it; one must get over these things with time, or where would any one be? Lady Sarah might make allowance for my relief about Philippa, instead of which she insinuates that I am heartless. I! Look at me! In crape from head to foot—the very thing I hate most in the world—and not able to speak without crying. But there is no one to stand up for me now; though I do think *you* might, Blanche, if you had any sisterly feeling."

"I'm sure *I* don't complain of your not being sufficiently upset, whatever Lady Sarah may do," said Blanche, drily. "On the contrary, I wish you'd pull yourself together a bit more than you do."

"It's all very well for you to talk—you have never known what real sorrow is," said Augusta, weeping yet more profusely; "and I must say Catherine's ingratitude, coming on the top of all the rest, is enough to scatter any self-command one has left to the winds. I am not to go

and see Philippa; she is not to be brought back here; though I am told the place she is in is little better than a pigsty; and her nerves are too much shattered for a visit from me. It was days before I was even allowed to know where she was. Why this mystery? Everything kept so dark. And then they fly to the opposite extreme, and just when Philippa is doing well, and one hoped the whole thing might be hushed up, out it all comes in the papers, and they say there is sure to be a trial, and for Philippa's sake all the facts must be known. I never heard such nonsense. How can it be necessary to let people know one's own cousin was almost starved to death? And it is sure to get about that it was my fault; though I had no more to do with it than the man in the moon."

"That is just what the facts will prove, and for my part I hope that woman Minart will catch it hot and strong," said Blanche, gloomily.

"I think it is very spiteful of you to say so, Blanche. For my part I always liked Mme. Minart, and I cannot believe she is half so bad as the police choose to make out. Of course they must be taking up somebody, or what are they for? As I wrote to Catherine when she sent me word she did not wish the poor thing to be prosecuted, and I never had the least idea of prosecuting her! Pilkington says that she is certain to get off very cheap if she is charged

on her own confession, but if she chooses to be charged on her own confession that has nothing to do with me. I am sure I am not fit to be prosecuting anybody. As I told David Moore, I decline to undertake any responsibility whatever in my present state of wretchedness. I will sign anything they put before me, but more than that I will not do."

"You are sure to be called upon to give your evidence as soon as Philippa is strong enough to appear, whether you like it or not," said Blanche, grimly.

"I have never done such a thing in my life, and I can't believe it will be necessary," said Augusta, resentfully, "when we don't *wish* to prosecute. However, to do David Moore justice, I believe he is doing all he can for Mme. Minart so it may end in her getting off altogether. I am sure I never wish to hear her name again. It's a lesson to me to see what comes of being good-natured, and asking other people's children to stay. I always said Roper was a most unsuitable person to have charge of Philippa. She had no influence over her at all, or how could she have let her run out alone into the street before breakfast; a thing nobody in London ever does. But Catherine would have it she was to be trusted, and you see the result!"

Blanche yawned unseen.

"Well, whether Lady Sarah likes it or not,

I shall go abroad all the same. Of what use can I be here? George Chilcott and Catherine and Colonel Moore settle everything just as they choose. I am nobody! I shall not come back to England at all, till the whole business of Philippa's escapade is forgotten, and she is safely engaged to young Kentisbury."

"It strikes me your exile will be somewhat prolonged then," said Mrs. Ralt.

"I don't see that. Every one knows he wants to marry her," said Augusta, peevishly. "And, as Lady Sarah says, the sooner she marries after this *esclandre* the better. He has made no secret of being in love with her. He told his mother on the night of the ball; and she told Lady Sarah, who told Tailer, who told my maid. That is how I came to hear of it."

"Well, I, for one, should be very sorry to see Philippa married to a young nincompoop who hasn't even begun to sow his wild oats," cried Blanche.

"Why must he sow any wild oats at all?"

"It's reasonble to suppose that he'll do much as his father and grandfather did before him. And every one knows what they were like. I don't trust the breed," said Blanche, bluntly.

"You always talk as though people were horses and dogs, and I do think you are very uncharitable, considering that Philippa met him at my house," complained Augusta. "I *was*

going to ask *you* to go to Plombières with me, Blanche; but when you are in this mood, I know very well it's no use asking you anything."

"Why don't you invite Grace? She suits you far better than I do."

"I *have* asked her," said Augusta, in an injured tone, "and she won't give any definite answer. She keeps shilly-shallying. To tell you the truth, Blanche, and strictly between ourselves, of course, I am getting rather sick of Grace Trumoin. She makes quite a favour now of doing anything I ask. One would think she would have jumped at coming to Plombières. She needn't take the baths. She can just sit about and do nothing. Every one knows *she* can't afford to get any thinner."

"H'm!" said Mrs. Ralt, and fell into a reverie. "Well, Gussie, I'm sure I don't want to be unkind, especially just now," in a softened tone. "So I'll tell you what—we'll leave it an open question. If Grace comes, I won't—and if she doesn't you can fall back on Bob and me. We're going to mote about Europe, anyway, so we may just as well make our headquarters there as anywhere else, so far as I can see. Where is Grace, by the way? I thought she was staying with you? Has she gone back to her flat?"

"Dear me, no! She is still here, and has been here ever since Catherine went away. How could I be left alone in my state? Not that she

is much good to me. She is downstairs in the morning-room playing Halma with that child. I must say it's very hard the way I am saddled right and left with other people's children. However, George Chilcott is taking Lily home to-morrow."

Augusta was unaware that George Chilcott was at this moment in her house, and watching the game of Halma in the morning-room, whither he had been ushered when he called and asked to see his little daughter.

"If I can't stop here any longer," said little Lily, dolefully, "and as Cousin Catherine doesn't want me now she's got Philippa back again—I suppose I must go home with you, daddy. But couldn't Lady Grace come with us?"

She looked up urgently into her father's face, and thus did not perceive the confusion of her friend, whose hand she held tightly. "It's getting very hot in London now," she urged, "and Lady Grace is very fond of the country. I'm sure she doesn't want to go abroad with Lady Adelstane. If you asked her, I believe she'd come."

"I don't know whether she'd come or not, Lily," said George Chilcott, looking over her head at Lady Grace, "but I know I've been wanting to ask her that question for some time past, and I don't suppose I shall ever get a better

opportunity to do so than now—by the lips of a very unconscious ambassador."

"Papa! I'm not unconscious," said Lily, indignantly. "I know perfectly what I'm saying. I want her to come and stay with us for a long visit."

"And I want her to come and stay with us altogether," said George, quietly.

"That would be better still," Lily said, overjoyed. "Will you—won't you come?"

"I think—I should like to, Lily," said Lady Grace, in a low tone.

"Then that is settled," said Lily with satisfaction, and neither her father nor Lady Grace could help laughing.

Mrs. Ralt at this moment opened the door of the morning-room. "What is settled?" she cried in her loud cheerful tones, and George pulled his moustache in confusion, but Lady Grace answered with a gaiety unusual to her:

"That I cannot go to Plombières after all, Blanche."

"She is coming to Bridescombe with us, instead," explained Lily. "I asked her first; and then daddy asked her; and she says she thinks she would like to—so I suppose that means yes."

"I shouldn't wonder if it did, Lily," said Mrs. Ralt, with twinkling eyes; and, to Lily's astonishment, she shook hands heartily with George, and kissed Lady Grace; and said she was never so glad of anything in all her life.

Perhaps the days that followed the finding of Philippa were among the happiest of Catherine's life.

The deliverance from the anguish of suspense she had suffered was in itself so great a relief as to be almost joy; while, in addition, Philippa, utterly dependent on her for the time being, seemed her own, as she had never been since her earliest childhood.

For, from the moment she regained full consciousness, she clung to her mother, and would permit no ministration from nurse or doctor save in her presence. She started from sleep in terror many times, to ask if Catherine were there, and whether David had gone away again and left her alone; and she was always calm and satisfied when she could see the face of one or the other.

Catherine felt no jealousy of David; she accepted his devotion and his services as a matter of course, without troubling to reflect that it was George Chilcott, and not he, who was Philippa's trustee and guardian. David was Delia's brother, who understood her and had saved her child.

George also was busy with her affairs, and perhaps Catherine regarded that, too, as a matter of course. But he had besides, a family and interests and affections of his own to occupy him; whereas David was unattached, and there-

fore free, if he chose, to constitute himself her knight and protector.

So David, though he went daily to his work in the War Office, was allowed to pay Philippa a visit morning and evening, and slept at the villa, mounting guard over the little household with a curious sense that Catherine and her child somehow belonged to him more nearly than to any one else in the world, and that no one else had so much right to defend them.

Catherine, too, was contented to leave everything to him, so that she was not troubled with business nor communications from the outside world, but could be left in peace to nurse her child.

For Philippa was still a child in her mother's eyes, though she showed herself less childish than ever before, in those wakeful hours of summer darkness, when she clung closer to Catherine and whispered something of the thoughts and dreams that had haunted those long days and nights of starvation and solitary confinement in the deserted house.

Catherine shed tears over the broken murmurs, as she heard of the courage and scorn with which the poor spoilt child first faced her imprisonment, so certain that somebody must and would come to her aid that she made no efforts to release herself—of the gradual despairing

conviction that she had been left alone to die—of the horrors that tortured her imagination as her bodily weakness increased—of the terrible faces in the darkness, and the pain—the pain that would not stop.

"Oh, let me tell you, mummie," she whispered piteously, when Catherine would have stopped her, fearing to let her dwell on these recollections; "it gets it off my mind to tell you. You know, at last I wasn't sure where I was—and whether it was night or day, because I saw the little breakfast table at Shepherd's Rest so plainly—even Roper's crusty loaf and the brown honeycomb; and I heard you calling me to come, but I couldn't move. And I thought then," said Philippa, very simply, "how often you had called me and I wouldn't come—and that I had lived sixteen years and done nothing, nothing of good in the world, and that now I would go out of it without any one being the better for my being born."

"O Phil, Phil, how little you know!" cried her mother, softly.

Catherine hushed her and soothed her, and listened in wonder to words which told her that Philippa's seeming heartlessness had been—after all—only a phase of her careless youth—a phase already lived through and left behind when the child, who was a child no longer, had battled through her dark hour alone, and among the

mysteries of solitude had come face to face with death.

But her cry now was to go home, and the demand brought back to Catherine's remembrance that Philippa's days at Shepherd's Rest, like the days of her childhood, were numbered, and that the news had yet to be broken to her of her cousin's untimely end, and her own inheritance.

Roper was sent down to prepare the cottage for their reception, as soon as it was considered prudent for the invalid to travel after the fatigue and emotion engendered by her necessary attendance at the police court; where, however, every possible consideration was shown for her weak condition, and the formal taking of her evidence soon completed. David arranged the details of their journey, which was to be made at night, both to avoid the heat and any possibility of a curious crowd at Ilverton, where George Chilcott had a close carriage ready to meet his young cousin and ward.

He performed the double service of escorting her and Catherine home, and of keeping his Aunt Dulcinea out of the way until Philippa had been safely settled in her own room and her own bed.

Poor Miss Dulcinea had time to exhaust her joy, her wonder, and her emotion generally over Catherine, before she was admitted to the presence of her grandniece next day. Then she was

so much overcome by the delicacy of Philippa's appearance that she burst into tears, and had to be hurried away, without regaining breath or presence of mind to make a single indiscreet revelation.

"But Philippa must be told about poor Cecil. I live in constant dread of her hearing it suddenly," Catherine said to George Chilcott, "and yet I fear the effect of the shock upon her. She is still very weak, and easily upset, and she worked herself up into a dreadful state about Mme. Minart, until David soothed her by promising to take her message of forgiveness, and to see that she and her family were provided for, and not left to struggle on in sickness and disgrace and poverty, poor things. I hope they won't be too hard upon her."

"How you can sentimentalise over that woman I can't tell," said George, rather crossly.

"I am sorry for any one who is driven to crime by want; for I suppose that is what it practically amounted to."

"Well, at least Philippa must have got over her infatuation."

"Yes, but the first personal experience of treachery must always be a shock; and now here is this terrible news awaiting her."

"You had better tell her yourself than let her find it out from some one else, as she is sure to do," said George, gruffly.

Catherine told Philippa one morning, as she sat beside the open window of the low oak parlour, looking almost ethereally delicate in her white wrapper, with her bright hair coiled above her transparent brow and large blue eyes.

The day was oppressively hot; the distant hills were shrouded in early mist, but the garden was blazing in full sunshine.

The Madonna lilies, in dazzling purity of illuminated white and gold, stood in rows below the open window, their glorious clusters almost on a level with Philippa's eyes, as she lay back in her low cushioned chair. Over a pointed rustic archway, the opening purple stars of a summer clematis dangled against the cloudless sky, above the crimson bunches of a rambling briar rose. The good red-brown soil of the Devonshire garden was almost hidden by the burden of its own wealth; deep-coloured pansies, scented sweet-peas, delicately tinted campanulas, and brilliant nasturtiums. The orange calceolarias, and the scarlet geraniums glowed vividly in the shade or shone triumphant in the sun; and the bees hummed about the lilies and the carpet of mignonette which sent its message of sweetness upwards to Philippa.

The long shadows of early morning fell across the dewy grass from the young spruce firs in the plantation Catherine had made from a bracken-grown paddock; and the birds sang rapturously

in the surrounding woods. A cow lowing piteously for her calf added a note of sadness to the scene of nature's waking and rejoicing.

Philippa listened to her mother's soft reluctant voice, and cried, and looked across the valley to the distant hillside, where, among the rounded tree-tops glowing in the haze of the early sunshine, the turrets of her own Abbey rose to view.

The almost fatherly love and admiration of her cousin Cecil had not been lost upon her; she cried to think she should see him no more, and because the thought of a new responsibility was too much for her in her weakness, and also because she had at times vaguely wished that her father's Abbey were her own, without consciously realising that the road to the attainment of her wish lay through the gate of death.

But she was young, and the details were spared her, and the story told so tenderly that the very suddenness of Cecil's end appeared in the most merciful light; so that she did not suffer, as Catherine had feared, from the shock. She was subdued and gentle, and shed tears from time to time, during that long day by the open window; while her mother waited anxiously upon her, bringing her the frequent nourishment she was ordered to take, and surrounding her with loving attentions, which, truth to tell, fidgeted Philippa not a little.

But the next morning she grew almost cheerful again, for little Lily was admitted as a visitor,

and chatted away, amusing her contemporary as Catherine with all her efforts was unable to do; for Philippa took little interest in the daily trivial happenings of the household and farm, and none at all in books, so that she was not an easy patient to entertain.

But as she and Lily bent their heads together and whispered, Catherine heard her child laugh more than once, naturally and merrily—a sound she could not but welcome, though Philippa stopped herself each time, with a guilty glance towards her mother, and an evident pang of self-reproach.

Catherine sighed, and yet was thankful; reflecting that it would be a melancholy world if the young could suffer as the old, instead of taking the misfortunes of their elders as much for granted as they are generally inclined to do.

"I am going to have a last look at the Alps," wrote Lady Sarah, who had paid farewell visits to Switzerland at regular intervals for many years past. "And if you wish to do me a kindness, my dear Catherine, in what may prove to be probably the last summer of my life, you will join me at Lucerne. I shall make my headquarters at the Schweitzerhof, which would suit us all admirably for a few weeks, but if you prefer something quieter, there is nothing to prevent us from migrating to some alpine village within

easy distance. The great heights do not suit my weak heart, and I am obliged to stay on my balcony and content myself with such scenery as I can enjoy from thence, without any attempt at climbing or touring. But this need not deter you, and the entire change of surroundings would be just what Philippa requires to get back the tone and strength she has lost. There would be opportunities for little quiet outings for her now and then, since, though you and I may be in no mood for gaiety, we must not forget she is a young thing who should not be allowed to mope, especially under the circumstances. I am breaking up very fast, and it would be a consolation to be allowed to see something of my grandchild before I die."

Catherine did not find herself able to resist this appeal, and laid the letter before Philippa with a suggestion that it was perhaps a duty to accept the invitation from her grandmother.

"Could Cousin David come with us?" said Philippa, with a very perceptible increase of colour.

"He could not leave his work, you know, darling. He can't even come down here very easily, he says."

"Then I don't want to go," said Philippa, very decidedly, and lay back in her arm-chair with a dejected expression which went to her mother's heart; while a large tear forced its

way through her closed eyelashes and trickled down her thin white cheek.

But the doctor combated the young lady's resolution so energetically that she gave way, on the promise that her mother would bring her home at the end of a fortnight if she did not like the change.

David Moore wrote his hearty approval of the plan, but he did not come down to Welwysbere to say good-bye, as perhaps Catherine had expected, but said that he was very hard-worked just now, and had arranged to take his holiday in the autumn, by which time he hoped Philippa would be quite strong again.

Lady Sarah's courier relieved them of all trouble and responsibility during the journey, and it was impossible for Philippa to say that she did not like the novelty and excitement of leaving her own country for the first time. She enjoyed even the Channel crossing, and the arrival at Calais, where poor Catherine looked around her in astonishment, for the familiar ramparts and gateways of her childhood had vanished, and it was a strange new Calais which met her disappointed gaze.

But Philippa enjoyed the long railway journey through the flat pollarded country, peopled by unfamiliar inhabitants in blue blouses, and slept soundly in the hotel at Bâle, where they broke the journey, sleeping in a *chambre à deux lits*, with quaint short wooden bedsteads, fur-

nished with mountainous feather quilts in spite of the summer season.

They found Lady Sarah at Lucerne, comfortably ensconced in a suite of apartments on the first floor of the hotel, with her maid Tailer, her tallest footman, and a little dog in attendance; and Philippa was so little fatigued by the journey that she was eager to go out at once and buy a family of wooden bears for Lily, though she could not be persuaded to interest herself in the probability of the clouds presently lifting from the summit of Mont Pilatte.

"I know exactly what mountains are like, mamma. I have seen dozens of pictures of them," said Philippa; and she was allowed to venture forth under the chaperonage of the severe Tailer, followed, much to her chagrin, and by Lady Sarah's peremptory orders, by the manservant.

"I will have no more adventures," observed her grandmother, "and you will be back again in half an hour, Tailer."

"Very good, my lady," said Tailer, who knew her mistress better than to be late by so much as a moment when she was given a time limit.

"The extraordinary thing is that the journey has absolutely done Phil good, instead of knocking her up," said Catherine. "She looks better already. How wise you were! For I have been very anxious about her lately."

"My love, you give yourself a great deal of

unnecessary anxiety," said Lady Sarah. "A week in this pure air will entirely restore her. She looks stronger than you do, for that matter."

"Oh, Lady Sarah, how can you say so? If you had but seen how languid and depressed she was, and how little interest she takes in things."

"I did not say her mind was stronger," said Lady Sarah, drily. "But it is impossible to look at her clear skin and bright eyes without perceiving that she is regaining her health as fast as possible. Whereas you, my poor Catherine, look pale and tired, and altogether worn out."

"I am one of the people who are never ill," said Catherine, shaking her head with a faint smile. "You have no idea how strong I am. Philippa is a very different matter."

"A little youthful companionship, my love," said Lady Sarah, "is all that is needed to cheer our sweet Philippa, and afford her the distraction she requires. It is impossible to tell what may be ailing a girl's spirits at that age. She is probably in love," said Lady Sarah, with a twinkle in her blue eye for which Catherine was at a loss to account, until the required distraction was presently supplied by the arrival of Lady Kentisbury, with her son and daughter, at the Schweitzerhof.

Catherine then understood very well, in spite of Lady Sarah's well-acted surprise, the reason why Philippa's grandmother had been so exceedingly anxious to pay a farewell visit to the Alps.

CHAPTER XXI

CATHERINE and her daughter remained in Switzerland until nearly the end of September, and during these two months Philippa not only regained her health completely, but fulfilled the traditions of her family by receiving an offer of marriage at sixteen, while she exasperated her grandmother by refusing it.

"She is too young," pleaded Catherine, whose heart was nevertheless secretly touched by the despair of the youthful lover and the disappointment of his mother.

"I am not too young, and I would not marry him if I were a hundred," said Philippa, with flushed cheeks, not at all grateful for her mother's gentle championship; for she felt herself quite able to face Lady Sarah's scolding unaided.

Lady Kentisbury was a meek woman; but the meekest woman in the world will turn upon the maiden who presumes to refuse her son.

"I have nothing to say," she said with great dignity to Catherine, "nothing at all," and she proceeded to discuss the matter immediately. "She is quite right to refuse him if she does not

really love him—though I should have thought —but, however, she is too young to estimate a pure disinterested affection at its true worth. Still, perhaps it is a pity she did not make her feelings clear a little sooner—that she should have allowed him to hope she felt quite differently towards him during all these weeks of boating and excursions and mountain-climbing together. I would never have encouraged it had I dreamt how it was going to end. It seems hard, after all the anxiety he suffered about her in London, that he should be called upon now to suffer all over again."

But Philippa neither felt nor expressed much sympathy with the sufferings of her rejected lover.

"As for saying I allowed him to hope, mamma, that is all nonsense," she observed, "unless snubbing him every time he opened his mouth is allowing him to hope. He is a nice boy, and has much better manners than Hector, and is not half so stupid; but it is not very likely I should marry a muff like that."

"You are a little idiot," said her grandmother, politely; but Lady Sarah, as has been said, was a philosopher in her way, and when she perceived that Philippa had made up her mind not to wed her cousin, she turned her thoughts in another direction, comforted herself with the reflection that her grandchild had correctly

described the young man as a muff, and set herself very kindly to console Lady Kentisbury.

"After all, my dear Jane, it might not have done. Philippa is a wilful, obstinate creature. She should marry a man of strong character who is older and wiser than herself. Kentisbury would never have had the strength of mind to keep her in order. Depend upon it she would have led him a fine dance. He had far better marry one of these pretty Americans with plenty of dollars and plenty of sense, who would be clever enough to amuse him and keep him out of mischief, and bring a little new blood into the family, and it is to be hoped a few brains into the bargain. And I hear wretched accounts of Philippa's property. Poor Cecil left his affairs in a sad muddle. Mr. Ash reports it will take all her four years of minority to get things straight again. He even advises letting the Abbey. That is what comes of marrying a rich woman. She saves her money and spends yours. Augusta was always the soul of selfishness."

"I do not care about money, Aunt Sarah," said Lady Kentisbury, reprovingly, "though of course Charlie could not very well marry a girl who had nothing of her own. But I do care about his happiness, and he has set his heart upon marrying Philippa."

"Pooh, nonsense," said Lady Sarah. "A boy of one-and-twenty has fifty hearts; what can it

signify if he loses one? Find the pretty American as soon as possible; and, Jane, don't lose sight of him for a moment, or he will be making some foolish marriage or other in the rebound."

"It's all very well to say don't lose sight of him," said poor Lady Kentisbury, in tears; "but he is of age, and if he chooses to go off to Timbuctoo or marry a French actress to-morrow, how can I stop him? He's broken-hearted, poor boy; begging even for a little hope, which I dare not give him."

"Dare not give him! Fiddledeedee! Send him to me—I will give him plenty of hope," said the unscrupulous old lady, with the utmost cheerfulness, "and Timbuctoo is an excellent idea. Now I come to think of it, Jane, it is enough to drive any young man to despair, to be sympathised with and sentimentalised over from morning till night by you and Joanna. He must go off on one or other of these African shooting expeditions. Who was telling me about them the other day? Oh, young Askillaun, a nice cheerful Irishman. He's going. I forget when, and I forget where; but I can easily find out. He shall invite Charlie. He would do anything for me; his father is one of my oldest friends."

"Do you want my boy to be killed?" shrieked his mother.

"There are no actresses in Timbuctoo," said Lady Sarah, grimly, "and it might make a man

of him, Jane. At present he is nothing but a little bundle of nerves and sensibility. I'll tell him that if he wants Philippa to regret him, the further he goes and the sooner he's off the better."

"I'm sure he and Lord Askillaun would have nothing at all in common," said Lady Kentisbury resentfully. "I believe he is a most reckless man."

But later on her son actually took his grandmother's advice, and, to the despair of his mother, departed in pursuit of big game in the wake of this famous sportsman; thereby forgetting his woes and improving his physique at one and the same time. Meanwhile the discomfort of those last days at Lucerne, the gloom of the unsuccessful suitor, and the reproachful looks of his parent and sister had to be endured.

"It is odd that two generations of rakes should produce such a milksop," said Lady Sarah to Catherine, quite calmly. "I remember his grandfather as a very pretty fellow, but a sad daredevil. I believe he never went to bed sober in his life," and she related to the horrified Catherine a number of the most scandalous anecdotes of Lord Kentisbury's forbears, concerning which she had not hitherto breathed a single syllable.

Catherine was not a little thankful, under the circumstances, to carry her child back to Devonshire, and Philippa declared and believed herself very glad to go. Nevertheless, the cottage seemed

very small, and life at Shepherd's Rest very dull, on her return from those long summer weeks of holiday-making in Switzerland, after the brightness and laughter of young companionship, the excitement of constant expeditions, the attentions of a young lover, and the new dignity of womanhood which her experiences at Lucerne had conferred upon her.

The old unhappy state of things seemed inclined to prevail once more in the familiar atmosphere of the home-life of mother and daughter.

Philippa's listless manner returned upon her, and in her mother's company she was very silent, though obviously and painfully trying to be less petulant and wilful than formerly.

There are some children who, as they grow up, ask of their parents only one thing—to be let alone to develop in their own way—and to whom the anxious counsel, the constant questioning and attention and watchfulness engendered by parental love, are insupportable.

The husband and wife whose characters do not accord, whose early love proves unable to withstand the test and fret of daily intercourse—form the theme of many tragedies or comedies of misfortune; but comparatively little is said of the parent and child in like case. Yet since this relationship is eternal—unchangeable—the tragedy in a sense lies deeper. The parent seldom speaks of the bitter love and disappointment

—the failure of earthly hopes—involved; nor does the child often utter its impatience of an affection beyond its powers of comprehension, nor explain its own yearnings for individual freedom.

Catherine said nothing; but Philippa's old Somersetshire nurse, with the shrewdness of peasant wit and motherhood combined, easily divined her trouble, and the cause of it, and was not slow to comment upon either.

"Her'll come back, my dear, doan'tee niver frit yarself. Her'll come back to yu, zo shar as Vate. And doan'tee niver frit her neither, wi' asking vor what her can't give. A young maid be often turble shy of they as knows her best, though seemingly her's ready tu give her very soul to the first stranger as axes vor't. Mind how 'twas in yure own yuth, my lady, and doan'tee git blaming on she. Wait till her has children of her own, and knows what 'tis."

"But she will be a middle-aged woman by then, Roper. And I want my child's love and confidence now," said Catherine, smiling rather sadly.

"Doan't us arl know the feeling on't, gentle ar zimple?" cried Roper, with zealous sympathy. "Luke tu my little Johnny, zech a wonderful gude bye as he used to be, like a little rose as 'twere, wi' his curly hair zo bright as zunshine, and putting of his tu arms round my neck zo loving as cude be. And luke tu him now, a great

hulking man, wi' a vace zo red as a beet, and making a great calf of hisself vor love of that vamous trapsing maid of Joe Brume's as I can't abide the zight on't, vor her du flout him proper. And yit I doan't complain, my lady," said Roper, in subdued tones; "var 'tis nart but nature, when arl's said and done, and 'tain't no use going against it."

But with the dawn of October came the bustle of change and arrival; for Augusta had sent word that she now felt able to collect her personal belongings at the Abbey, and remove them to her London house; while Lady Sarah, not to be outdone, suggested at the same time that she would like to pay a visit to her old home before the proposed final breaking up of the establishment there, and hinted adroitly that she should expect to find Catherine and Philippa established in their proper place there to receive her.

Catherine once more received a pathetic letter from her mother-in-law.

"The recollections of such a visit," wrote Lady Sarah, "however melancholy the association, must greatly cheer the closing days of my existence; and, moreover, my dear love, it is just as well, in our sweet Philippa's interests, that some one as intimately acquainted as I am with the Adelstane treasures should be present to keep

an eye upon Augusta's claims; who has no conscience whatever, I regret to say, where *bric-à-brac* is concerned."

George Chilcott earnestly seconded Lady Sarah's proposition, and Catherine accordingly went quietly down to the Abbey with her daughter one afternoon, and took possession of her old rooms there.

Lady Sarah and Augusta arrived the same evening, and the sparring matches that immediately ensued left Catherine little time for memories or for sentiment, for she had much ado to keep the peace between them at all; while civility obliged her to sympathise with Augusta, in the privacy of her apartment, after they had retired upstairs for the night.

"It will not be so bad to-morrow," she said, consolingly, "for Mr. Ash will be here, and George will bring over David Moore, who is coming to Bridescombe for a few days; you know Lady Sarah is always in a better humour when there are a few people about, and that she hates being alone."

"At her age, with one foot in the grave, it seems to me most extraordinary that she could cling to the company of gentlemen as she does," said Augusta. "But the one thing I insist upon, Catherine, is that not even George Chilcott or David Moore must be asked to dinner, while I am in such deep mourning. You must remem-

ber that though they may be your relations they are not mine. Luncheon I do not mind so much; but I draw the line at dinner."

Catherine soothed her by assurances that her wishes should be respected, and that her hospitality to her cousins should be strictly limited by the clock, during Augusta's visit, and the widow gradually grew calmer, though her complaints were still numerous.

"Did I tell you how oddly Blanche behaved to me abroad? Towards the end of our stay at Plombières she scarcely spoke to me, though I had lost nearly half a stone in weight, and was feeling as weak as a cat. We were quite thankful to part. Since then she has not written once, and if you will believe me, she forgot my birthday!"

"Perhaps she thought that under the circumstances"— hinted Catherine, delicately.

"I should have imagined that under the circumstances she would have been more anxious than ever to show she had not forgotten me, since there was no one else to remember," said Augusta tearfully, and Catherine felt conscience-stricken, for she, too, had forgotten this interesting anniversary, and could not feel sure that Augusta's reproach was not directed partly towards herself. "It's the attention I care for," said Augusta. "If she had even *written*, though that would have been disappointing enough, since she can't write letters, and she can buy presents.

I only expected a trifle. But to be forgotten altogether! Last year she sent me that diamond pendant with the pink pearl."

"I remember. It was very handsome."

"She can well afford it," said Augusta, resentfully. "She has no expenses whatever. A tailor-made suit and a motor, and there she is! Or rather, where is she?—for she flies all over the place, and one never knows even where to send a telegram or a postcard to remind her of anything. By the by, when does Grace's wedding come off? I'm told, now that it is settled, Mrs. Chilcott has quite come round, and is boasting of Grace's connections, as though they were her own, which must be very unpleasant for Grace. But, however, as she and her daughter are going off to live at Cheltenham, it will not signify so much. My maid told me all this, and she heard the wedding was fixed for Christmas. Since her engagement I have heard next to nothing from Grace."

"They are to be married very soon. I do not think the date is fixed."

"Well, I hope she may be happy; but I must say I think George Chilcott is a great fool, for she hasn't a halfpenny in the world beyond her four hundred a year. And she has very extravagant tastes. She dresses better than I do."

"Come, Augusta, you know you are very fond of her."

"I used to be fond of her; but one can't go on being fond of a person who gives her whole attention to somebody else. Talk of loving your enemies," said Augusta, in melancholy tones, "I must say I have always found it more difficult to love my friends. One has so few enemies they hardly count; but one always has friends and relations, and they always say horrid things either to you or about you, like Lady Sarah, or get tired of you and go mooning about after somebody else, like Grace."

Lady Sarah was already in bed when Catherine, in response to a message from Tailer, visited her room, and very picturesque she looked, as she lay propped up among her pillows, with a fringe of silver curls neatly stitched inside the borders of her night-cap, which was tied with pink ribbons beneath her handsome witch-like old face.

"Well, my love, so here we are again. I see you have taken care to give me my own old room, a thing Augusta never had the grace to do in all her sixteen years of ownership here. I assure you, my love, I am very sensible of the attention, and I made a point of letting Augusta know it. If anything could console me for what has happened, it is the thought that that woman is ousted from her place here," said Lady Sarah, with an energy that belied her age. "Pray did you hear her advising me to begin Swedish exer-

cises at once, and offering to teach me to breathe? Teach me to breathe!" said Lady Sarah, with great indignation. "I have managed to breathe for eighty odd years, however, without Augusta's help, I believe."

"Dear Lady Sarah, won't you be at peace even with poor Augusta just now?" said Catherine, entreatingly. "You are at home, in your old place, and, however sadly it came about, I am thankful to see you there. But my heart is very full to-night."

"To be sure, poor child, *you* have not slept under this roof since our poor Philip— Ah, Catherine, I talk of Augusta, or anything else, to keep myself from dwelling on—what has happened," said Lady Sarah, in a trembling voice; "I am like Beaumarchais' Figaro, I must needs laugh lest I weep. I have gone through life laughing, upon that principle."

"You are braver than I," said Catherine.

"I need to be," said the old woman, "with nothing before me but—the dark, and an eternal good-night. At my age one puts one's head on the pillow every night with the pleasing certainty that Death cannot be far off. . . . When my time comes, Catherine, for slipping away into the unknown, I would not mind seeing your kind little face by my bedside."

Catherine touched her hand caressingly.

"You won't be afraid?" she said softly.

"No, my dear, I shall not be afraid."

Lady Sarah was silent for a moment, and then spoke again:

"But you have half *your* life before you still, little Catherine, and perhaps the happiest part."

By the light of the fire she saw Catherine shake her head.

"No—for the happiest part of a woman's life is when she is absolutely and individually necessary to some one's happiness. That time will never come to me again, now Philippa is grown up. But I have her safe, and I am content. I ask no more."

"I ask a good deal more, for I want to see Philippa's son before I die," said Lady Sarah, grimly. "The sooner she marries David Moore, and settles down here, the better I shall be pleased."

"David Moore!" Catherine drew her breath, startled. "Do you think— But I am sure—I am certain he looks upon her as a child."

"Stuff and nonsense; there are eighteen years between them—a very proper difference. He called upon me in town yesterday, my love, and told me he had been offered the post of military *attaché*—I will not say where, as it is still a secret; but it is everything that is most delightful. Of course, I saw in a moment why he came and told *me* all about it. He is spoken of everywhere as a very rising man, I find, and he is only at

the beginning of his career at five or six and thirty. And as he belongs to no particular family, of course he will make no objection to taking the name of Adelstane. In fact, it will help him along, and he will probably get the baronetcy back into the bargain one of these days. It won't hurt his career to have a rich wife. Besides, he is a fine handsome fellow, very unlike that poor little *chétif* Kentisbury. So now you know why I was so anxious to come down, my love."

Catherine hardly listened to these details; she was dumb, with a surprise half pleasurable, half painful.

David—and Philippa. Her little Phil.

"There is no reason for delay that I know of," said Lady Sarah, "though I daresay he will want a little encouragement, since he is a chivalrous and disinterested kind of person—just the sort to jib at an heiress—they are very rare nowadays. I don't mean heiresses, but disinterested men. However, I know one when I see one. I took care to let him know she had refused Kentisbury. Their marriage could be next June, when Philippa will be seventeen, and the engagement will keep her happy and contented all the winter, and give you time to buy her clothes. For my part, I hope he will speak out as soon as possible. I hate shilly-shally."

"You will not say anything—you will not do

anything—to bring it about." Catherine hardly knew what she said.

"I! Is it likely?". said Lady Sarah, with a guilty twinkle in her blue eyes. "By-the-by, I did perhaps suggest his running down here to see us all; for he let out to me, quite unconsciously, that he had been keeping away by design."

"I have wondered why he did not come," said Catherine, and paused, while a thousand indications of Philippa's feelings towards David rushed upon her mind, and brought conviction.

"You need wonder no longer, my love, but go to bed and dream of the future, since we cannot alter the past, dream as we will; whereas, with a little care and forethought it *is* sometimes possible to shape the future to one's ends. I confess it gives me pleasure to think of Philippa's son reigning over the Abbey; though, as a rule, I consider the happiness of being a grandmother is much overrated. How it can make any woman of experience happy to stand by and see her sons and daughters mismanaging their children, I have never yet been able to understand," said Lady Sarah.

Philippa sat alone under a great oak-tree, which spread gnarled branches above a grassy mound in the grounds of Welwysbere.

It was late afternoon, and the sleepy twittering

of birds, the calls of the wood-pigeons from one grove to another, alone broke the silence.

Among the motionless trees there stretched away an open space of green before her, where Italian vases of carven stone gleamed whitely from their grey weather-stained pedestals upon the velvet turf, holding up glowing burdens of rose and scarlet branching bloom, vivid in the low light.

A group of autumn flowers, orange tritonias, cactus dahlias, and white standard hydrangeas, broke the vista of green upon green.

The restfulness of age, of centuries of cultivation, was upon the garden. The sun was setting, and the low dazzling rays gleamed through the lime-trees of the western avenue. A cock pheasant ran across the red path, unheeding the motionless figure; two little rabbits stole from beneath the rhododendrons, and played, unsuspecting, on the grass.

Beyond, the mighty oaks and tall elms stretched away in perspective into the mist of distance and approaching eve; the shining road wound away from the portals of the great house that was hers, to the unseen village below.

The melancholy of this solitary corner of her wide domain suited with her mood; for her heart ached with that sense of longing and loneliness and disappointment which is even harder to bear in youth than in age.

Report said that Colonel Moore had been out

shooting with George Chilcott all the afternoon, but he had not come to the Abbey, though the irrepressible Lady Sarah had dropped many hints that morning to Philippa of poor suitors who required encouragement from rich maidens. She had even gone so far as to relate the story of the rose given by a reigning queen to a silent prince, in token of the love that he must not and she dared not speak.

But whereas in many maidens of sixteen an outwardly childish aspect conceals much inward and womanly guile, yet in Philippa's case her womanly appearance was belied by a most sincere simplicity, and she could no more have profited by Lady Sarah's hints than she could have put into words the love and longing which now possessed her bosom.

Nevertheless, her heart beat faster when she presently perceived, at the far end of the open glade before her, the figures of George Chilcott and David Moore, each with a gun under his arm. She knew that in her white gown she must be visible to them both, but at the opening in the bushes which led to the stables she saw George pause, speak to his companion, and turn away into the by-path.

David came towards her, alone, and as she lifted her eyes to his face something gentle and wistful in his expression made her rise and come down to meet him.

With a mixture of simplicity and stateliness that became her extreme youth and her personal dignity very well, Philippa put her hand into his.

Catherine, in her plain black gown, sat at the writing-table in the great hall at the Abbey, and through the great mullioned window perceived David, walking slowly across the park, in the low afternoon sunshine, by Philippa's side.

The hall door stood open; the deer were couched in a circle upon the edge of the turf beyond the drive, in the shadow of a majestic cedar; the red Devon cattle browsed quietly in the sunshine. The tall elms threw long shadows over the grass, and the loud cawing of the rooks sounded through the open doorway.

The great clock in the corner ticked loudly in the silence. At the foot of the pillars which supported the arched roof stood groups of ferns and exotic plants, lovely in form and colour and scent, lighting up the darkness of the black oak with which the hall was lined, and the sombre family portraits hung upon the panels.

Numberless blue porcelain bowls and pots and jars of every shape and size, filled with *pot-pourri*, stood on the shelves and in the recesses of the carved oaken mantelpiece, as they had stood for generations past.

Catherine found herself dwelling regretfully on

the thought that the Abbey was presently to pass, even for a time, into the hands of strangers. She wondered at the indifference with which she had hitherto regarded her child's inheritance.

Now that she sat here, in her former place, as *châtelaine*, she became sensible once more of the charm possessed by an ancient and stately house for its inmates; the charm of light, of space, and solitude at will; of echoing tradition in old-world chambers, of dim arched corridors, of silent rooms unoccupied and haunted with memories, of treasures collected under one roof, belonging to several centuries, and linked by the ownership of successive generations.

A change of atmosphere often changes the point of view, and just now the spell of her haven at Shepherd's Rest relaxed and grew fainter, the claims of her cottage life seemed less compelling.

She laid down her pen and waited—with beating heart.

David and Philippa came into the hall together, and Philippa, without observing her mother, passed with light, swift steps and mounted the branching staircase to the gallery above. Then David, left alone, saw Catherine.

He put down his gun, and came and stood beside the writing-table, looking down upon her with his hands in the pockets of his brown shooting jacket.

"Catherine, will you trust your child to me?"

"Far—far sooner than to any one else in the world."

"I didn't mean to say anything to her, or to you yet," he said, and the colour mounted in his thin, tanned face. "But Lady Sarah——"

"Oh, Lady Sarah! She is *impayable*," said Catherine, with a little nervous laugh, half amusement, half embarrassment.

"She has spoken to you?" said David.

"Last night she spoke of her fear that you might need—encouragement," said Catherine.

He laughed.

"Did she think it was the Abbey that stood in the way? No, no; it was her youth," he said simply, "but when I heard about Kentisbury! Though I know it can't be just yet," he ended, rather confusedly.

"I have come round to Lady Sarah's way of thinking," said Catherine. "I believe my Phil will be happier married young—if only it is to the right man."

"I hope I am the right man," he said wistfully. "I am afraid all the advantages, besides youth, are on her side, though. But she's too generous to think so, and I'll devote my life to making her happy, Catherine."

"I think you will make her happy," Catherine said.

She looked at him with a faint, pathetic smile

hovering over her lips. Certainly Lady Sarah was right. David was a fine handsome man. Strength and energy seemed personified in his tall, broad-shouldered figure, and from his clear eyes shone sympathy, humour, and intelligence.

The most casual observer could have seen all this; but Catherine was something more than a casual observer. Her intimate knowledge of Delia revealed to her very fully the character of David, while the intensity of her love for Philippa gave her also something of the sensation of a *clairvoyante* gazing for a brief moment into the future. She perceived that a time would come when this eager sensitive man would appeal in vain for sympathy and understanding to her cold, beautiful child, who was yet as sincere, as upright, and as guileless as her father had been before her. What did David know of her child's heart—who had fallen in love with the curve of a lovely mouth, the glint of a blue eye; who was bewitched, in a word, by youth and beauty, and the triumphant secret sense of love returned?

And she would not be able to help him—nor to help Philippa.

She could not live their lives, and, though she understood David so well that she often knew what he was going to say before he spoke, she could not make Philippa do the same.

On the strength of their love must their hap-

piness depend—the love that blinded David now—that she prayed might blind him always—to the limitations of Philippa.

His voice—the voice of a happy lover—broke in upon her thoughts.

"Catherine, she hates the idea of letting the Abbey—it must not be."

"You won't give up your work," she cried, startled and anxious. "You won't settle down here yet?"

"No, no, no. She is as keen as I am over my work, God bless her! She will come abroad with me—when the time comes—but we'll talk of that later. In any case, I hope we shan't be free to settle down for many a long year yet. But it it would be nice to have the place always ready to come back to. Catherine—we want you to come here, and make your home here, and look after everything and keep it going. No one could do it so well as you. It would be a kind of head-quarters for them all: poor Aunt Dulcinea—Lady Sarah—whom you would. And letting the place for three or four years, as Ash proposes, couldn't make any real difference to Philippa's interests. Besides she is quite willing to make any sacrifice to have it so, if you will consent."

"I was thinking just now—I should not care to see strangers here," she said slowly, "and—after all, the place is very dear to me."

"To be sure it must be, since it was your home.

You, too," said David, rather tenderly, "have loved here."

"I have lived and loved," she said dreamily.

"And been loved," he added warmly.

She turned and looked at him quickly, upon a sudden impulse; and though she immediately looked away again, David read the mute denial of his last words in her eyes.

Thus Catherine came back to the Abbey, and took care of it for her child, and for the children of her child. The belief which belongs to youth, that life must be holding some definite prize in reserve—some wonderful happening that time will presently reveal—gradually died away, and she asked herself, Is this all? with the wistfulness of middle age; yet realising her destiny at last, with a submission to Fate that held more of amusement than of regret.

Doubtless she would presently grow to be content that this was all; for, though there may be many mortals who feel at times even their daily existence to be something of a burden, yet there are but few who are ready and willing to lay that burden down.

THE END

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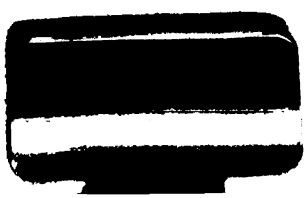

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